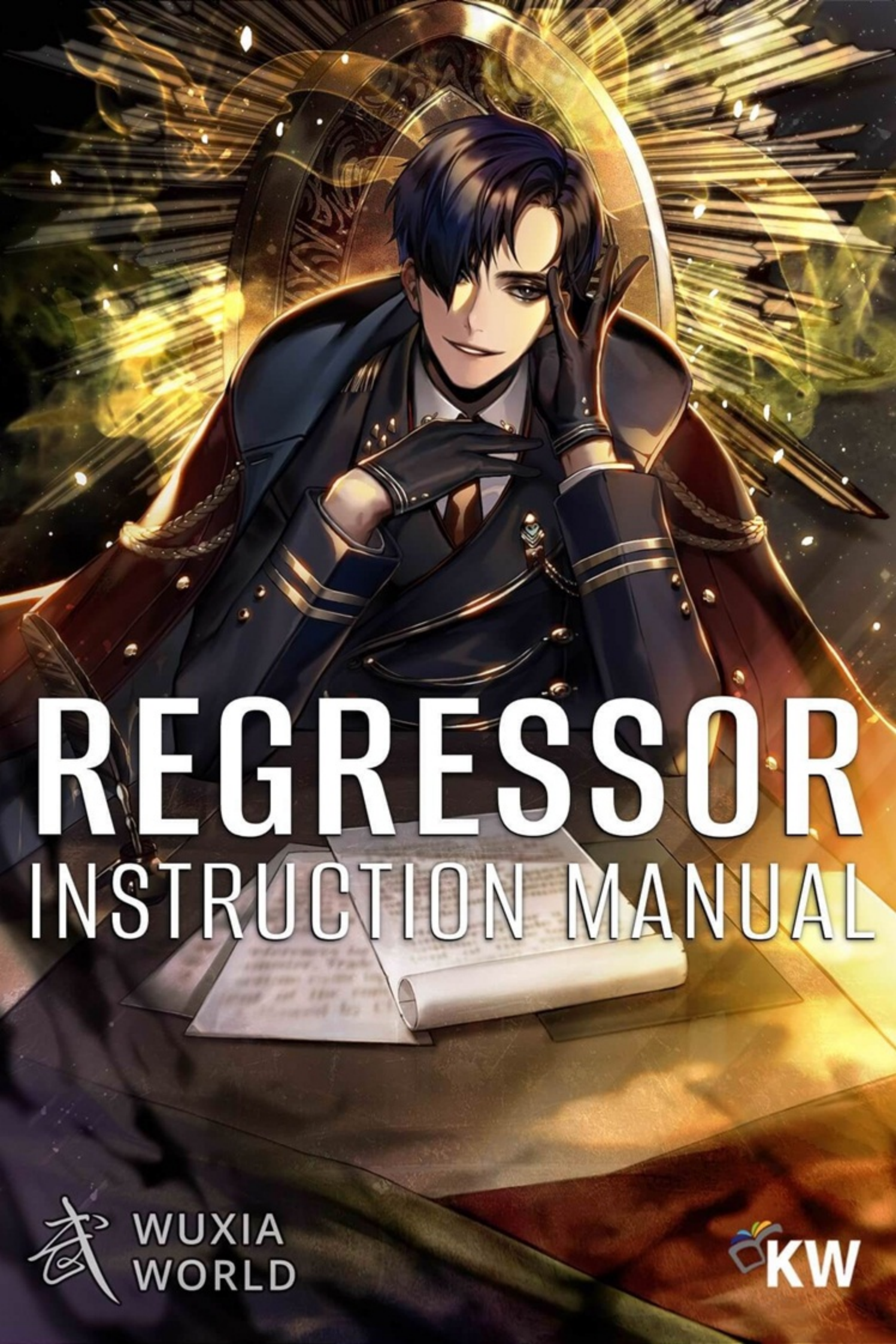
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
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REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

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[WUXIAWORLD]

CHAPTER 552
MOTIVE FOR REVENGE (1)

“So… what happened after?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. I honestly don’t remember the details anymore because it happened a long time ago. I remember walking around until the Blue Guild found me. The dungeon attack team back then…” Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

“Was there an attack team back then as well?” I asked.

“Yes. I’m not sure if you remember, but there’s a man named Jung Jin-Ho…” he replied.

“*Ah*, that crazy murderer,” I commented.

“That’s right. Lee Ki-Chul and Jung Jin-Ho created an attack team. That’s probably how they cleared the tutorial dungeon. Of course, it wasn’t through ordinary means.

“According to the stories I heard after we were out of the tutorial dungeon, they apparently rounded up the others who had been hiding and used them as sacrifices.

”It won’t happen anymore, but… Jung Jin-Ho didn’t join any guild. He eventually became the leader of the Murder Brigade, which influenced the continent negatively, he got notorious, but I remember that his ending was a bit disastrous,” he explained.

“So…”

“I had to kill him while we were going deeper into the tutorial dungeon, and that was why we went together. In the end, Yoo Seok-Woo… he managed to hurt you because I left, but I had to take care of Jung Jin-Ho. That man was a psychopath, after all,” he continued.

“I’m kind of curious about how he died. So what happened to him in your past life?” I asked.

“He was betrayed,” he answered.

“What?”

“He died tragically after falling into a trap that his comrades had created for him. A guild in Lindel killed him, but the masked man and woman were probably the ones who led him to his demise.

”Anyway, Jin Cheong—the demon summoner… h-he was a member of the Murder Brigade. I don’t really know, but I’m sure there was a power struggle within the brigade. The criminal of the era—he was nothing more than Jin Cheong’s puppet,” he explained.

“I don’t really understand. It’s difficult to digest all this information. Anyway, Jin Cheong…” I trailed off.

“Yes, he was the worst of humanity… Actually, I think it’s best if I tell you this a bit later. He appeared after Jung Jin-Ho’s miserable ending.

”Anyway, Jung Jin-Ho was killed by hundreds of arrows. He screamed and shed tears of blood while smiling at the skies. His last words were a lament of how he found it a shame that he couldn’t kill another person. He was kind of terrifying,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘This guy is suddenly talking about Jin Cheong when he was just talking about himself. He also said that it happened way later.’

“I’m sorry, I think I lost you,” he commented.

“No, I’m fine,” I told him.

It was an interesting story.

I discovered through Kasugano Yuno that Demon Summoner Jin Cheong and Jung Jin-Ho were quite close to each other, but who could have thought that Jin Cheong would backstab him in the end?

I couldn’t help but think that it was a villain-like act that had driven mankind to hell in his past life. There probably wasn’t another cold-hearted scum in the world who was distrustful of everyone and was willing to betray his comrades to achieve his

goals.

'Good thing we took care of him earlier.'

I felt relieved that we managed to get rid of those two terrifying villains.

If those two were still alive, there was no way we would be able to relax like this.

'I'll stop thinking about them since I'll keep hearing about them from him, anyway.'

Kim Hyun-Sung's past life was more interesting than theirs.

'He's definitely talented.'

I wasn't sure whether he was showing off or not, but the fact that he was able to kill dozens of Agwis during his first and second job change meant that he was talented.

He had obtained the necessary job knowledge, but he had instantly used the knowledge to his advantage as if it were an instinct.

I figured that he ended up awakening because of his hyung's death. It was a relief that his hyung died heroically because it was like a life lesson for Kim Hyun-Sung.

However, I started thinking about why Kim Hyun-Sung hadn't decided to look for that hyung of his upon regressing.

'I'm sure he tried, but he probably wasn't sure because he had no idea what his hyung looked like.'

The only thing Kim Hyun-Sung knew was his hyung's voice, and it was also highly likely that Kim Hyun-Sung didn't hear his hyung's voice clearly.

In other words, Kim Hyun-Sung had probably decided to abandon the idea of looking for his hyung because it was unrealistic to do so.

There was also the possibility that Kim Hyun-Sung had simply forgotten about it.

"As for that hyung you met…" I muttered.

"I tried looking for him while doing the tutorial, but it wasn't easy. I ran while

panicking and remained in that cave that I don't even remember," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'So he did try to look for him.'

"I'm sure he's alive somewhere. I'm not certain, but I don't think he's the type of person that dies easily… More importantly, the number of monsters compared to my first life decreased," he continued.

"So there was a reason why you wandered outside alone," I commented.

"Yes. I didn't wander around the dungeon specifically for that reason, but—anyway, I joined the Blue Guild. I received less attention because I didn't join the attack team…" he replied.

'Your skills will show even if you try to hide it.'

I was sure that people discovered that he was a hidden gem while he was training with the newbies.

"I received an offer from Miss Cha Hee-Ra and Miss Park Yeon-Joo, but I chose the Blue Guild. The biggest reason I chose the Blue Guild was that I couldn't really compare them to the other guilds.

"Miss Lee Sang-Hee helped me a lot as well. I'm sure you already know, but the Blue Guild wasn't in a good place at the time, so we went through a lot of things. The situation got even worse when Lee Seol-Ho brought in Ito Sota. The first war started by then," he explained.

"What?" I asked.

'It really was a mess.'

"The battle between Celia and Lindel was the first war I had experienced, even though the war didn't last that long. I thought the Democratic Country would intervene, but they didn't do that," he added.

'It's understandable.'

I was sure that Ito Sota had total control over the Democratic Country at the time.

It seemed that he had a lot of influence over the Vatican as well, and I was sure that he had done his best to minimize the Democratic Country's intervention.

It didn't make sense that the Democratic Country—the old Empire at the time didn't intervene properly, but they managed to decrease the influence of the Adventurers, so I couldn't really say that the old Empire had made a wrong decision.

I deduced that Charlia and the emperor were probably the leaders of the old Empire, so it was questionable if it had been a calculated move on their part.

However, their decision accelerated the war with the Republic. There was no way that scum Jin Cheong wouldn't take advantage of such an opportunity. In other words, Kim Hyun-Sung's first life was hell with neverending battles.

A war against Celia, the appearance of the Murder Brigade, the war with the Republic, and the masked scum Jin Cheong probably appeared around that time as well.

Kim Hyun-Sung probably regressed after all those events.

That was all I knew.

I was sure he went into dungeons in between all of those events, but the chaos was never-ending. I was curious about when Park Deok-Gu died, but based on the flow of his story, it could be between the war with Celia and the appearance of the Murder Brigade.

I wanted to be sure of the details, so I wanted to hear more, but the sun started rising.

'We were up all night.'

"One thing I'm sure of is that many things changed when you joined the Blue Guild," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"*Ah…*"

"We didn't go to war with Celia, and there was a power struggle between the Vatican and the Empire. We quickly got rid of Ito Sota, and we managed to take care of Jin Cheong.

”The nations quickly consolidated their powers and united. I’m sure we’d already be in the middle of a continental war if it wasn’t for you,” he continued.

“It just ended up like that…” I muttered.

“You have no idea how thankful I am,” he said.

“After the war with Celia…”

“I took over the Blue Guild,” he said.

‘That’s exactly when it happened.’

That was when Kim Hyun-Sung started to gain both influence and power.

“I’ll explain the war between Celia and Lindel in detail later, but I became the Guild Master of the Blue Guild after the war. There were many casualties on both sides, and many guild members died as a result of the war. The empire got busy, but they only started moving after the war. If it hadn’t been for Ito Sota’s death, the war would have lasted way longer, and many more people would have died,” he added.

“What happened to Ito Sota…” I said.

“I killed him myself. I could have died in that encounter, but I got lucky,” he answered.

‘I want to hear the details… this guy’s pretty amazing.’

I was sure the war was the impetus for his growth, but it didn’t mean that he immediately became stronger than Ito Sota. If my memories were serving me correctly, Ito Sota’s Agility was already 99 at the time.

Kim Hyun-Sung was a genius, but I was sure that his Agility back then was still way below 80. His revelation was even more surprising because I had seen Ito Sota’s speed myself.

Kim Hyun-Sung was right; he indeed got lucky.

I got even more curious as time went on.

I wanted to know more about how Kim Hyun-Sung carried the Blue Guild into

becoming one of Lindel's best guilds. Kim Hyun-Sung definitely got famous after the war, and I was sure that many people invested resources in the guild.

Unfortunately, Kim Hyun-Sung was a pretty incompetent guild master, and his sub guild master at the time—Lee Sang-Hee—was incompetent as well. I thought about it a bit longer, and I nodded.

I wasn't sure how long the war lasted, but if my assumption was right…

'I think that's when Jo Hye-Jin joined the guild… '

The timeline of the whistleblower incident in Castle Rock overlapped with the end of the war. I was sure it took them longer to become one of Lindel's best guilds because they didn't have competent staff members like Kim Mi-Young, but they still managed to do it.

'I think he cleared an Epic-rank dungeon.'

Clearing an Epic-rank dungeon at the time was enough to attract the attention of many people.

"There were many difficulties, but thanks to Miss Hye-Jin joining the Blue Guild at the time, the guild grew a lot."

"I see. So that's why you appointed Miss Hye-Jin to the Chief Secretary position the moment she joined…" I commented.

"I-I'm sorry about that…" he stuttered.

"It was to also take off some of the responsibilities from you, but she was someone I could trust," he continued.

"Were Ye-Ri and Ha-Yan a member of the guild as well?" I asked.

"Miss Ha-Yan wasn't part of the Blue Guild. At the time, I believe she joined the Devil's Guild… After the war, Jin Cheong tricked her into taking her own life…" he replied.

I saw Kim Hyun-Sung reading my expression while talking, so he definitely saw my stupefied expression.

“That bastard…” I cursed.

Kim Hyun-Sung got anxious.

CHAPTER 553
MOTIVE FOR REVENGE (2)

Kim Hyun-Sung started panicking as if he had made a mistake. He had been pouring out as much information as he could after telling me what he had to go through in the tutorial dungeon of his first life, so he probably blurted it out without realizing it.

He was probably thinking that he was being inconsiderate because Jung Ha-Yan and I were a couple. It wasn't strange that he was panicking because he had basically come out and said, "Hey, some douchebag in my past life tricked your girlfriend into killing herself. It was brutal, and we also found traces of her being abused by that scumbag."

Obviously, it happened in Kim Hyun-Sung's past life, but we still went silent after he mentioned Jung Ha-Yan's death.

"…"

"So that's why… I see…" I trailed off.

"Yes?"

"Jin Cheong was showing interest in Ha-Yan, and he even gave her a note. At the time, I thought he was just interested in her abilities as a mage…" I answered.

"I'm sure she would've fallen for his tricks again if she hadn't met you. Luring people has always been his specialty," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"How did she die?" I asked.

"S-She overdosed in her room, and we found her dead. We didn't see any physical injuries, so w-we thought she was murdered…" he replied.

'Wow, Hyung-Sung. You're really trying to be considerate.'

"I figured out what happened from the letter she left," he added.

Jung Ha-Yan hung herself. Kim Hyun-Sung was just being considerate by how he was avoiding the details.

'At this point, it's safe to say that it cleared up any misunderstandings, right?'

Lee Ki-Young died in the tutorial dungeon in his first life. Kim Hyun-Sung was no longer suspicious of Lee Ki-Young.

I thought perhaps his suspicion disappeared the moment the demons decided to kidnap me, but I really wanted to shout and jump for joy after confirming it myself.

"Jin Cheong…" I mentioned.

"I couldn't really quite understand him. As I mentioned, he was humanity's greatest enemy," Kim Hyun-Sung reminded.

"And Hee-Ra noona…" I said.

"The Mercenary Queen went missing during the war, but what I know is from the Red Mercenary Guild's announcement. I'm convinced she died during the war in the hands of… Jin Cheong. Miss Hye-Jin… and my comrades… they died. He killed them…" he replied.

"*Whoo*… it feels strange. It definitely hasn't happened in this life, but…" I commented.

"I'm sorry. I guess I scared you," he apologized.

"No, I'm actually thankful that you told me, and I knew it would be scary. I can handle this much shock as well. I'd be lying if I said I'm comfortable, but… I don't think those things will happen this time.

"I'd like to hug… Ha-Yan, Hee-Ra noona, and everyone else once we go back. What in the world was that demon summoner—"

"He was probably trying to get revenge on mankind," he interrupted.

"Revenge?" I questioned.

"I'm not certain, but he was definitely an enemy of mankind, and he was the one who brought harm to the continent. He covered an entire city with a plague and infected

his allies with plagues," he answered.

"*Ah…*"

"Just like how Jung Jin-Ho frequently abandoned people, he deceived the entire continent by using and abandoning both his enemies and allies. I tried to figure out his motive, but I couldn't figure it out," he continued.

'You tried to figure it out? Really? Is that… why you did that?"

I got scared, so I decided to say, "I think he doesn't have a motive. I don't think ordinary people like us will understand people like him. Especially you, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I'm sure you won't understand him."

"…"

"I think he's just messed up in the head—that's it. I think he's the same type of person as Jung Jin-Ho. Actually, he's more awful and wicked. I think he's addicted to inflicting pain on others like it's a drug for him or something," I said.

"That's… possible, but I thought he had some kind of reason…" he mumbled.

"People like them are incomprehensible, and I think he was just acting. I'm convinced that the reason he was wearing a mask was to play a character he wanted to play. He was just playing as someone who hated and wanted to get revenge on mankind. I was trying to figure him out as well," I explained.

"Figure him out…"

"I wanted to know why he urged the Republic to declare war and why he summoned a demon in Laios. However, I couldn't find anything. At first, I thought I was mistaken because I was convinced that a motive was necessary to wage war and inflict pain on others, even if he's deriving pleasure from it," I replied.

'He really is a piece of shit.'

"However, I wasn't mistaken. He had no motive… he just wanted to have fun," I added. "…"

"He was just that kind of person," I said.

“H-have fun…” Kim Hyun-Sung bit his lips and started trembling.

Everything he had been through and experienced so far happened because of that piece of shit’s evil hobby. His fury was indescribable. I was sure that many things had happened in his previous life that he hadn’t told me yet.

There had to have been many battles, but the pain that he had experienced along with humanity and his comrades turned out to be all because of…

“It was all because of that…?” Kim Hyun-Sung muttered.

Many people died gruesome deaths. Kim Hyun-Sung had been questioning Jin Cheong’s motives, so he felt dejected and furious at the same time after hearing my suggestion.

I couldn’t help but sympathize with him because I would have reacted worse than him if I were in his shoes.

However, I still had a burning question.

I wanted to know if Kim Hyun-Sung and the Blue Guild were related to Park Deok-Gu’s death.

Park Deok-Gu died to protect the masked scum, and I was sure that Park Deok-Gu’s death was the impetus for the masked scum’s fury and his quest to take revenge on the continent.

I got even more suspicious because the Blue Guild and Kim Hyun-Sung had been a part of the masked scum’s plan.

‘Was there a misunderstanding?’

I wouldn’t know until I heard the entire story.

‘I’m sure I’ll hear them little by little.’

I was both hungry and sleepy. I drank a potion to stay awake, but it was clear that it was no longer effective.

I had to calm the furious Kim Hyun-Sung down, but I had to get an answer to another

burning question of mine. I couldn't really directly ask him about the final boss, but it wouldn't be a bad idea if I led him into talking about it.

I decided to question the overall situation because I was sure that I would get to hear many different stories from him.

I patted Kim Hyun-Sung's shoulder and said, "It hasn't happened, and it will never happen again, so calm down."

"Yes, you're right," he said, but he still looked uncomfortable.

"He's dead, and he already paid for his sins. Of course, I don't know the details of what happened because I'm not a regressor like you, but it's all over," I reassured him.

'This should be enough.'

Kim Hyun-Sung nodded happily, but his expression turned grim upon hearing my last sentence.

"Actually… it's not over yet," he said. "Jung Jin-Ho, Lee Seol-Ho, Ito Sota, and Jin Cheong are no longer here, but there's still a threat.

"I told you I'm a regressor because I wanted to take some load off my shoulders, but I also need help for the upcoming threat."

'Yeah, that's what I've been waiting for, Hyun-Sung. Let's end it all and be happy ever after.'

"Now that I think about it, Goddess Benigoa…" I mentioned.

"Yes, a threat does exist," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

"…"

"…"

"The Fragment of the Outer God," he said.

"The Fragment of the Outer God?" I asked.

“I know this sounds strange, but I won’t tell you any lies. I’m going to tell you about the Outer God that Miss Sun Hee-Young saw in the wormhole. I’m not sure how it managed to come here, and I don’t know its motives as well,” he said.

“…”

“Anyway, it hates humans, but it’s trying to control the continent. I think it will be more apropos to say that it’s trying to maintain the population. This is something I heard from Jin Cheong himself in my past life…” he continued.

‘Huh?’ I noticed something strange. *‘I thought mankind got annihilated?’*

I could still remember that Kim Hyun-Sung was alone in the world of his consciousness, and it was a world that he had seen prior to his regression. Obviously, there weren’t any survivors, and I could remember that he had already accepted that truth back then.

Therefore, I couldn’t help but question his words about how the Outer God wanted to maintain the population because the scene I saw was different.

‘What’s going on?’

I immediately came up with two possibilities. The first possibility was that the Outer God’s real goal was to destroy the continent.

‘The Outer God is not perfect as well.’

Gods weren’t perfect. Benigoa had emphasized that. I figured that was why it had to gather followers. It needed holy power. It was just a fragment, so it probably realized that it couldn’t devour every living organism on the continent by itself.

Therefore, it decided to make humans fight each other by luring people over to its side.

After gathering enough holy power, it abandoned its followers. It then devoured the continent and betrayed its followers. Afterward, it probably went to another continent to do the same thing.

The second possibility was that the Outer God’s real goal was management.

'It's possible.'

If I were in its shoes, I would probably be interested in managing the continent, especially if I were really interested in humans. The Outer God had no one else, so I was sure it wanted to play God by managing the continent. The question was how did the continent get to that point? What were those ruins I saw in the world of Kim Hyun-Sung's consciousness?

The chance was low, but…

'The masked scum didn't backstab the Outer God, right?'

I couldn't imagine the masked scum listening to the Outer God's every word and becoming its loyal follower.

The masked scum probably joined the brigade with revenge in mind, and I saw from his behavior and mood that his thirst for revenge was unquenchable.

The Outer God was thinking about maintaining the continent's population, while the masked scum wanted to annihilate mankind.

Jin Cheong probably pretended to be its loyal follower and then he backstabbed the Outer God by destroying the continent. There was also the possibility that he had influenced the Outer God to execute his plans.

If my second assumption was correct…

'That bastard was a real asshole.'

He was definitely a master of backstabbing.

CHAPTER 554
PREPARATION (1)

“Of course, I’m not certain that the Outer God Fragment is trying to maintain the population. I’m embarrassed to say this, but I couldn’t really seize more information at the time. In the end, I was the only one left alive, so it was highly likely that Jin Cheong lied or the Outer God Fragment just gave up,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“In the end?” I pointed out.

“Yes, I was the only one left alive back then,” he replied.

“What?” I asked.

“…”

“…”

“I see, so you don’t remember,” he commented.

“What are you talking about…” I questioned.

“It’s nothing,” he answered.

Kim Hyun-Sung seemed disappointed. I figured he was hoping that I would remember our meeting in the world of his consciousness, but I decided to hide it because it wasn’t really that important at the time. In addition, I wanted to keep it a secret because I would have to explain many things if I were to reveal the truth.

New questions popped into my head while I was organizing the sequence of events, and I also discovered new, interesting facts.

For example, Kim Hyun-Sung being the only survivor remaining on the continent, and the relationship between the Outer God Fragment and the masked scum.

There were also many things that even Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t know, which made me

think of even more questions.

“I think it’s best if we stop here for now. I’m sure you’re really tired from listening to me all night, so if you’re exhausted, you should rest and sleep here today…”

“No, the other guild members are probably waiting for us. I’d like it if you could tell me more about the Outer God Fragment as we walk. We can also go to the city and get something to eat,” I suggested.

“*Ah!* That sounds like a good idea,” he said.

‘Information.’

“It can be the smallest detail, so please tell me,” I requested.

“Of course. Actually, it should be me asking you to listen,” he agreed.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked really relieved. I was sure he had decided to tell me all this because he thought that he couldn’t do all this by himself. He looked as if he let down all of his burdens just like before when we met in the world of his consciousness.

He knew what was going to happen in the future, but he had no idea how to fix it or where to start, so his reaction wasn’t really strange.

I was sure our lovely regressor could only think of becoming even stronger to protect everyone. Of course, he could explain the threat to us and tell us how to prepare for it, but he wasn’t really good at that.

I felt happy to see him relieved.

“If I were to describe its appearance, it looks foreign. It’s not like the elves or the other races. Its appearance makes you feel a sense of indescribable awe. It’s like you’re staring at the advent of a god to the real world, but it’s different at the same time. Benigoa and the other gods are the closest gods to humans, while the Outer God is from a higher dimension,” he explained.

“In that case… aside from Jin Cheong, are there—” I asked.

“Yes, there were other people who believed in it and had abandoned mankind. It called them God’s Disciple, and those people influenced the continent by following

the will of the Outer God Fragment.

”Of course, Jin Cheong was at the summit. Just like how you’re Benigoa’s symbol, he was also the symbol of the Outer God Fragment,” he answered.

‘Were they gathering holy power? That bastard was a cockroach.’

I was sure that he would somehow survive even if he were teleported into the middle of a great desert.

Anyway, the Outer God Fragment definitely needed holy power because holy power was basically power and money to the gods. Regardless of its goals, it needed holy power.

‘Hm… ’

As expected, it wasn’t that difficult to gather holy power through its followers.

It was a god that went around spreading holy power to create followers.

I could understand what Kim Hyun-Sung said about an indescribable sense of awe because I would also feel that way whenever I was staring at Benigoa.

However, it was clear that the Outer God Fragment was an overwhelming presence because it could inspire awe in Kim Hyun-Sung’s heart.

I was sure its appearance was capable of inspiring people’s hearts, and it was highly likely that people had decided to follow it right away after a few miracles.

In addition to Jin Cheong’s specialty of incitement and fabrication, it had to have created a ton of followers back then.

‘It must’ve been really easy.’

I didn’t understand why only a portion of humanity were accepted as followers.

“It didn’t come down by itself. It had followers, and they looked like angels,” Kim Hyun-Sung described.

It seemed that it had an army of its own as well. It was fortunate that Kim Hyun-Sung

had decided to tell me about everything today rather than later. Kim Hyun-Sung continued talking, and I listened intently.

This was the summary of what he told me.

1. The Outer God Fragment's exact goal is unknown. On the outside, it seemed like its goal was to maintain the population of mankind. The goal of maintaining mankind's population wasn't strange if I were to assume that it didn't get a continent of its own or it simply couldn't get a continent of its own to manage.

2. The Outer God Fragment's appearance was no different from other gods. It looked foreign, but it could still inspire a sense of awe in humans.

3. Even Kim Hyun-Sung had no idea of the Outer God Fragment's exact strength. For now, I assumed that it was stronger than Belial, and it was highly likely that attacks below Semi-Mythic wouldn't work on it. In other words, there would only be a few people capable of injuring it.

4. The Outer God Fragment had followers, and mankind calls them angels. The so-called angels support the Outer God Fragment, and I assumed their numbers are equal to Donovan or Rimoura's divisions.

5. There was a high chance that it was summoned in the north. The first fight happened in the north, and they started making multiple moves afterward.

There was still room to go a bit deeper, but it wasn't like I couldn't hear Kim Hyun-Sung's story anymore.

Anyway, it seemed that the first thing I had to do was create a base in the north.

'He said he's not sure, but it's better than doing nothing.'

I wasn't really expecting that much because it wasn't like things would go exactly as what Kim Hyun-Sung had experienced in his past life.

After all, humans would change their behavior and path depending on their

situation, and I was also concerned about the butterfly effect.

I was sure that the butterfly effect was the reason Kim Hyun-Sung had no idea what to do, but things were now different.

The Outer God's Fragment would definitely appear.

The Outer God's Fragment was the continent's enemy, and its arrival was inevitable. Even if hundreds of butterflies started flapping their wings, the Outer God Fragment's arrival was inevitable and imminent.

'But this could be easy… '

We could prepare for it. We could train troops that could fight and create a wall against the Outer God's Fragment. We could also research weapons capable of injuring. The masked scum Jin Cheong was already out of the picture, so we had the advantage.

I started thinking of many different ideas, which probably worried Kim Hyun-Sung.

"Mr. Ki-Young, you look exhausted…"

"*Ah*, I'm kind of tired, but I can endure it. I'm hungry, though, so we should order…" I said.

"I ordered in advance. Are you okay with bread and stew?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Yes, that's fine," I replied.

"That's what you usually eat in the morning. You looked like you were deep in your thoughts, so I didn't bother asking," he said.

"It's fine since you probably ordered the same thing…" I told him.

"That's a relief. How about we stop thinking for now and eat? You're still recovering, and I feel like you're really exhausted… I'm worried that maybe I've taken up too much of your time," he said worriedly.

"You don't have to worry too much," I said.

I was kind of tired, but my Stamina was higher than ordinary people, so it shouldn't be an issue for me to pull an all-nighter. I also discreetly drank a Fatigue Recovery Potion.

Unfortunately, it seemed that I had become fragile in Kim Hyun-Sung's eyes because he looked worried that I might faint. I found it amusing that he was worried about me, even though he was the reason why I had to pull an all-nighter.

Still, he was correct; I was indeed exhausted.

The moment we entered the restaurant, all eyes landed on us, so we couldn't really continue our conversation. Kim Hyun-Sung could easily surround us with soundproofing magic, but the gazes of so many people were a bit difficult to endure.

'Why are there so many people here so early in the morning? Koreans sure are diligent.'

I noticed people smiling happily while dragging their heavy bodies and heading to their workplaces. It was so early in the morning that I was getting worried about them breaking the proper working hours as prescribed by the law.

Heren was indeed lively early in the morning. I saw people gathering to find parties, and I saw many adventurers in the restaurant starting their day by preparing breakfast.

I was staring at the adventurers absent-mindedly when a simple bread and stew was served in front of me. I started eating while Kim Hyun-Sung was talking to me. However, I really didn't listen to him. In the end, Kim Hyun-Sung told me to stop thinking about it, but I couldn't stop thinking about his past life.

'What's the key point?'

I was thinking about what I could do to jump into a pool of sweet honey.

'That's the most important part here.'

I wasn't sure about it, but if I were to throw it out as insurance, I was sure that I would hear useful information.

'Holy power.'

The masked scum Jin Cheong had perished, but his followers were definitely still out there. I was sure that the denizens of the Sacred Democratic Country wouldn't fall for Jin Cheong's followers, as their belief in Benigoa was strong, but…

'We have to be prepared.'

We had to be prepared for the Outer God's Fragment. We weren't capable of whittling its power down, but we were more than capable of hindering its growth. We couldn't really tell everyone about what was coming, but we could give them hints.

Without education, information, and explanation, it wouldn't be strange if some people ended up falling for the Outer God Fragment's cult.

We had a lot of things to do, and I decided to do the easiest task first.

I smiled while nodding.

Kim Hyun-Sung saw that and smiled as well.

Three days later—the Sacred Democratic Country Daily Report—no, every press on the continent released the same news with the same headline.

[Goddess Benigoa Descended Into Father Lee Ki-Young's Body Once More—An ancient demon with the mask of a god and an angel will destroy the entire continent and make every living creature mourn. What kind of preparations do we need to make? - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Sacred Democratic Country Daily Report]

CHAPTER 555
PREPARATION (2)

- Let’s get started with today’s announcement. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who decided to come here to this press conference.

- First of all, I would like to start with a simple briefing.

- On midnight of the 24th, Father Lee Ki-Young of the Blue Guild returned from his vacation, and Goddess Benigoa descended into his body again.

- It was unexpected, so we couldn’t prepare many things, but we would like to make an official announcement because the Blue Guild had sent us a message regarding Goddess Benigoa’s descent—no, Goddess Benigoa’s will.

-…

- An ancient demon with the mask of a god and an angel will destroy the entire continent and make every living creature mourn. The beings that threaten our way of life have taken that appearance in the darkness.

- I’m not in a position where I can say much, but this threat will be disastrous to mankind and the continent. We have to unite to survive the imminent threat. We have experienced many threats and conflicts.

-…

- I have been observing you for many years as you've lived on this continent. There have been deaths and births, as well as instances of hurt and malice. However, my faith in mankind has never wavered. I decided to borrow Father Lee Ki-Young's body to tell everyone that I have always believed that humans are inherently good and will ultimately choose what is right.

-…

- This is a very serious ordeal, and it will determine the fate of this continent.

However, I have faith in mankind. I have no doubts that peace will return once more and that you can overcome this ordeal. Overcome it. You can do it. Please overcome this serious ordeal. Make the darkness realize the strength of mankind's light. Dissuade the darkness from stepping foot into this holy land.

-…

- That is all. We're planning on uniting the churches of the other gods and forming an organization that will fight this ancient darkness. Many religious organizations are currently waiting to hear their god's voice, and we've confirmed that Elune has also delivered His message through Miss Elena.

- An unprecedented darkness is approaching. The Sacred Democratic Country, the Republic, the Union of Kingdoms, and the Federation have come to the conclusion that this is a continent-wide crisis. We're going to form a Continental Protection Management Committee that will manage and protect the continent. That is all.

- What?

- Is that true?!

- Please tell us once more, Miss Oscar.

- The entire continent will soon be under the Continental Protection Management Committee, and the members of the committee will be announced once the list has been decided. We're currently discussing every potential candidate in the entire nation, religious organizations, army, and large guilds, and we'll do our best to pick members that the people of the continent will have no qualms accepting.

- Until then, the governments will manage their own regions throughout the continent, but the moment the committee is born, the press, publishing companies, rallies, and battles will be under the management of the committee.

- The committee has a specific purpose, so our power over the many different groups of the continent will be minimal at best. I believe that this is something that requires emphasis, and that is why I said it. That's all the information the central government has to say. We'll make sure to inform all of you as soon as we have decided on the members of the committee and other small details.

- Let the questions begin.

- I'm Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Sacred Democratic Country Daily Report, Miss Oscar.

- Yes, Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong.

- I'm sure you're aware that this will cause a lot of confusion. The people throughout the continent are already somewhat aware of the approaching threat, and I'm sure you have already considered the influence that your announcement will have the moment it is released.

- Anyway, why does it sound like you're beating around the bush regarding the possibility of mankind's annihilation?

- You're already aware of the mass confusion that this announcement will cause, so is there a reason why you decided to organize this official meeting?

- We thought hard and long about it. As you mentioned, the majority of the denizens will have a hard time accepting this topic. I'm sure everyone will be extremely confused.

- So…

- However, we're strong. We've come this far by experiencing many things and overcoming many threats. Father Lee Ki-Young believes that this issue is something everyone living on this continent has to face rather than just the government, so we decided to accept his will. The continent can overcome confusion and fear. Just like Goddess Benigoa, I also have faith in mankind. That's all.

- I'm Jacob from Laios.

- Yes?

- Goddess Benigoa said an ancient demon with the mask of a god and an angel would destroy the entire continent and make every living creature mourn.

- That's right.

- I'm curious about the description. An ancient demon wearing the mask of a god and an angel? Just what is it? Is there no further information?

- Yes, that's it. Many religious organizations are interpreting Goddess Benigoa's will in their own way, but they haven't made much progress for us to announce anything substantial.

- However, the description of the ancient demon wearing the mask of a god and an angel is probably not just a description of its appearance. We think that it means the ancient demon can wield holy power as well. Anyway, we'll make another announcement once we have fully interpreted her will.

- Thank you.

- I'm Sergeisky of the Republic Column.

- Yes?

- I'm curious about the intentions behind the creation of the Continental Protection Management Committee. Can you tell us more about just how exactly you're going to manage the continent?

- I'm sure you're all aware that the darkness looming over the continent is still there. Ito Sota and the demon summoner of the Republic were just a part of the darkness looming over the continent, and we think that they are doing the same as those two.

- We're convinced that the ancient demon with the mask of a god and an angel is hiding behind the light. Its presence is a crisis in itself. As a leader of a nation, I hope you'll understand that it was an inevitable decision.

- I'd like to ask more questions.

- Sure.

- What's the reason behind not revealing Goddess Benigoa's descent through the goddess' mirror? The fact that the Continental Protection Management Committee is limiting the denizens' rights to freedom is no different from the Martial Law Enforcement Headquarters declaring martial law. Many are concerned that perhaps this is a fabricated scenario to let Father Lee Ki-Young wield so much power.

- What?

- What the hell is that bastard saying right now?! Get him out of here right now!

- Some are doubting if Goddess Benigoa actually descended and borrowed his fleshly body. During the war with the Republic, there were suspicions points about Mr. Jin Cheong being accused of summoning the undead creatures, so we would like to know if you are essentially declaring martial law and if the goddess has truly descended!

- Shut him up! He's a comrade of the demon summoner! How dare you talk about martial law!

- Mr. Jin Cheong isn't a demon summoner. Take a look at this document. If we dig deeper into what happened back then, it is clear that Mr. Jin Cheong was also a victim…

- Who let that bastard in?! Drag him out right now!

- Mr. Jin Cheong isn't a demon summoner! *Mmm! Ack… Mmm!*

- You demon servant! Do you even know where you are right now?!

- *Mmm!* No! Noooo! *Argh!*

- Call the heretic inquisitor here!

- Noooo! Lee Ki-Young, you're not human! There's no way the commander would have done what you have accused him of! There's no way!

- Shut him up!

- You're the demon wearing the mask of a god! Lee Ki-Young! That's who you are!

- Shit! Get him out of here!

-…

- And this is why we want to establish the committee. As you can see, movements like that still exist in the continent. It will be inconvenient in many ways, and I understand that many people are concerned about it. However, this is all for the continent's sake. The committee will not become a tool for those in power. Father Lee Ki-Young has also repeatedly declined our offer to become a member of the committee.

- I'm Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report! Is it because of his health…

- No.

- He was in a lot of pain when Goddess Benigoa borrowed Father Lee Ki-Young's body for the first time. I have another question. Are you certain that there's nothing wrong with Father Lee Ki-Young? It's an important question, and the denizens of the Democratic Country would like to hear an answer to it. I'd appreciate it if you could answer the question.

- That's…

-…

"I'm healthy," I said.

"It's really unsightly to see you eat snacks while lying down. I'm sure the people out there will be shocked by this sight," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"It can't be helped since Benigoa didn't descend into my body," I told her.

"If possible, it'd be effective if you can actually show Benigoa descending into your body while everyone is watching… You're not going to play another video in the goddess' mirrors?" she asked.

"I can't do it this time. I can just say that we weren't able to film it, and it'll be suspicious if I were to use that card haphazardly," I replied.

Honestly, I wanted to make another video, but it wasn't a great idea at all.

I would have no idea how to handle Kim Hyun-Sung's questions if I told him that Goddess Benigoa had descended into my body. I had already heard his story, so it was better for me to make people understand things without doing something that could hurt my chances of success.

Our regressor had also agreed that this kind of announcement wasn't so bad.

My heart broke because I had no choice but to use the press for transparency's sake, but this was all for the continent's sake. Right now, there was nothing more important than unification. Actually, I wanted to declare war right away, but…

'This is better than that.'

There would be many complaints if I were to do that. Of course, I could easily get rid of the complaints, but an administrative influence over the entire continent would be more beneficial to me.

It was also difficult to manage the entire continent by myself, so a committee was necessary. While I was deep in my thoughts, Lee Ji-Hye next to me started talking once more.

"Did you see that just now?" she asked.

"That wasn't strange at all. How many people do you think even care about them? They're being suppressed by the other reporters… We don't have the luxury to keep an eye out on everyone who looks crazy," I replied.

"Anyway, is it the truth? Where did you hear that information, and how much do you know?" she asked.

"Let's just say that I did not make it up," I answered.

"I knew it," she commented.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I thought you were going to devour the continent. I thought you were going to bring the press over to your side, declare martial law, and become a dictator in the next hundred years.

"However, I knew that you were going to tell people about an upcoming threat for the sake of gaining influence," she answered.

"I'm not that scummy… The people of our country don't really like martial law, but we have no choice because we are in an actual crisis. I'm really not making this up, noona. I'm not lying at all. One mistake and that is it.

“Do you really think that I would willingly declare something like that? I just had no other choice,” I explained.

“I guess you’re serious,” she said.

“Of course.”

“Then, are you really not going to do that? Are you really not going to join the committee?” she asked.

“No, I’m joining the committee. Why would I not do that?” I replied.

“…”

“However, I’m not going to volunteer. I’m going to wait until they become desperate,” I added.

I checked the clumped-up newspaper and saw many titles.

[Who Has the Qualifications of a Leader? Several Candidates Were Nominated, But It’s Still Difficult. - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

[Father Lee Ki-Young Must Make a Big Decision… - Vatican News]

[A New Volume of How the Alchemist and the Genius Swordsman Loves Was Published In Less Than a Month. The Fans Cheered For the Shortest Interval Between Volumes. - Reporter Kang Yumi of Lindel’s Ministry of Culture]

[Lien Xiao of the Republic Has Been Nominated, But Can They Obtain the Support of the Leaders and the People of the Continent? - The Republic News]

[A Transparent Decision Must Be Made More Than Ever. What’s on Father Lee Ki-Young’s Mind? - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

It was all coming together, and no one would find it strange.

CHAPTER 556
PREPARATION (3)

It had been a while since I returned to Lindel, and the Blue Guild's *vacation* was a success. I enjoyed exploring the nearby areas and towns with the members of the Blue Guild after we got home from Mirror Lake.

Kim Hyun-Sung and I couldn't really enjoy it, so we started discussing plans. However, the overall mood wasn't that bad. I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung was excited to face the troublesome future because he finally had someone he could rely on.

It seemed that he had already put down the burden he had been carrying that I saw in him while we were in the world of his consciousness. I was sure he had been under a lot of pressure while thinking about how to handle the future only he was aware.

Kim Hyun-Sung's mood was great. He still had that grim look on him, but he would actually take a break during breaks. He even started making weird puns.

'There's apparently a unique job that requires you to buy drinks for someone every time you meet them. Do you know what job it is?'

'What?'

'A mage.[1]*'*

'Ah… '

Jo Hye-Jin was the only one laughing at his puns, and I found it interesting because Jo Hye-Jin actually sounded like she was genuinely laughing. Kim Ye-Ri could only force herself to laugh, and I honestly thought about doing something about this guy.

I wanted to look into his past life once again to see where he had picked up this kind of humor. I thought perhaps his weird puns represented his desolate heart, but his personality had definitely improved.

Anyway, the Blue Guild returned to Lindel and went back to work.

I enjoyed my time on the ship with Jung Ha-Yan, Elena, and Sun Hee-Young.

I spent quite a long time with Cha Hee-Ra, which had already been scheduled ahead of time. For some, it was a time to recharge, but it was tiring for others.

I had fabricated a scenario of how Benigoa had possessed me to send a message to everyone, so I was able to use that as an excuse to be lazy. Sleeping all day wasn't really that pleasant, but dealing with matters was still more tiring.

Benigoa's words spread like wildfire throughout the continent. The nations and the guilds who were starting to relax went on high alert once again. Benigoa's words also resulted in a lot of panic. I didn't expect the people to panic to the extent that some of them were even crying out on the streets about the end of the world.

The crime rate also increased, albeit slightly.

The Sacred Democratic Country, the Republic, Laios, and the Continental Union could control the masses, but the Federation and the other poorer regions areas that had been destroyed by the 72 legions and Belial, as well as the minor nations from far away, were starting to become problematic.

[When is the end of the world?]

[The irresponsible Benigoa and the gods of the continent have abandoned us.]

[Why must we endure all this pain?]

Wild rumors spread like wildfire, and I felt bothered hearing those crazy bastards yelling in the city square about how the end of the world was nigh.

I would understand the panic of the Federation denizens, but the actions of the denizens from minor nations and smaller regions made me sigh.

It seemed that improving the overall mood of the Sacred Democratic Country was

easier than doing the same for the entire continent.

“Oppa, you know the saying if there’s one rotten apple in a box of apples, the entire box of apples will become rotten, right? If they’re not really helpful, getting rid of them might be a better decision.

”Despite what happened, they’re running around like maniacs and shouting—We’re all gonna die! so how can they be helpful? I’m sure that they’ll taint the other regions as well with their wild accusations and rumors if we don’t do anything about them.”

The masked woman Lee Ji-Hye made a scary and scummy comment. I couldn’t really tell whether she was serious or not, but unlike her thoughts, I wanted to bring those people with me so that I could use them as meat shields.

They were so weak that I doubted if they would even side with the Outer God Fragment once it appeared. However, there was a job that they could do before the Outer God Fragment’s advent.

Every people on the continent was helpful because they provided holy power to Benigoa or merits to Belial. I would definitely jump for joy if Belial became strong enough for me to maintain Doom Ki-Young mode for a long time.

In other words, I could deal with them in the future.

‘I should make some time and visit them once.’

I was planning on going to the north and creating a forward operating base, so I thought touring the minor nations wouldn’t be a bad idea. Of course, I would only do that after I was done taking care of all my scheduled tasks.

The candidates for the Continental Protection Management Committee caused the most confusion and chaos. Candidates popped up everywhere, but many people questioned their qualifications.

Cha Hee-Ra actually got dropped after becoming a candidate, and the reason for her disqualification was actually pretty harsh. They said that Cha Hee-Ra couldn’t make a reasonable judgment during battle.

Well, they weren’t wrong, but their words definitely hurt Cha Hee-Ra’s feelings.

The press kept on talking about who was qualified to become a committee member of the Continental Protection Management Committee, which caused conflict between the denizens of the continent and the adventurers.

A committee member would have a lot of power because they would basically be managers of the entire continent, so it wasn't really strange that the people were sensitive about its members.

The leaders of the minor nations were one step behind the major nations, but they were interested in the topic as well.

Many things would change depending on the committee members, so it wasn't strange that even the minor nations were paying attention to the announcement. A committee member had to prioritize the benefit of everyone, not just their own nation, so the people of the continent were extra wary about the candidates.

The minor nations and the major nations like the Sacred Democratic Country and the Republic started treating the candidates like hot potatoes. They were supposed to unite against a common enemy, but it seemed that they were still humans with their own ideas.

Quite a few candidates wanted to use this opportunity to bolster their nation's power, while the adventurers wanted to grow their guild by becoming a committee member.

There were also some who were trying to use those who were preaching about the end of the world for political advantage, while others doubted that the end was really coming. Everyone had their own thoughts, but they all wanted the same thing.

'Balance.'

The minor nations didn't want the gap between them and the major nations to widen. In other words, they wanted a righteous human being with no filth to lead the continent and stand at the helm of the committee, and they had to be a strong enough deterrent to those greedy enough to take advantage of the committee for their own benefit.

They wanted a leader who wouldn't get swayed by greed or personal emotions; they wanted a leader whose priorities were the safety and the prosperity of the continent. In addition, they had to be intelligent, powerful, and with enough experience.

I could already deduce the most qualified individual to be the leader of the committee, and he was none other than Light Ki-Young.

'Yes, this era wants Light Ki-Young as their leader… '

Of course, it was difficult for me to sway public opinion that way because It was impossible to please everyone in the world. Opinions were split because I had been tainted by the demons long ago, after all.

[If I Were Asked If Father Lee Ki-Young is Suitable to Lead, I'll Say No! With Conviction. - The Republic Papers / I have no intentions of committing suicide after this is published.]

Similar headlines were being released. The reporter was quite confident, but he wasn't exactly wrong. Many people were also concerned about my health, and I even saw articles about how I had to stop overworking. There were also people who questioned if it was even okay to give that kind of position to me.

My public image was decent, but managing a continent was a completely different story.

However, the public was saying that I had to take the position, and influential people were even saying that they couldn't allow governments, military authorities, or even guild leaders and masters to take the position.

It seemed that they wanted someone who would be more like a mediator rather than a leader.

They couldn't trust each other, so they had no choice but to look for the most impartial and innocent-looking person. In addition, the denizens were ardently supporting me.

- Of course, it should be Father Lee Ki-Young! I can't trust the leaders of other nations. Father Lee Ki-Young is the only person who can maintain the balance of the continent!

- What do those rotten bastards of the central government know?! They know nothing!

- I feel so bad. It'd be nice if Father Lee Ki-Young gave it a try at least once… At least for five years. It's too bad…

- My mother said she's against Mr. Lee Ki-Young taking that position, but I will support him with everything I have. This era wants and needs Father Lee Ki-Young.

The executives of the Sacred Democratic Country's central government frequented the city these past few days, even though they had always been complaining about how Lindel was too far from the capital.

"Are you… still not interested?"

"I'm not sure. I believe there's someone more suitable for that position, but… I'm afraid I don't really know who they are. Anyway, I don't think the position fits me," I answered.

"That's not true. Who would question your qualifications? Miss Oscar is against it, but the majority of the leaders of the other nations want you, Father Lee Ki-Young. Religious leaders and the guild masters of many large guilds feel the same. We need a pillar that would unite the denizens of the continent, the adventurers, the religious and national leaders, the marginalized groups, and others into one. No one can do that except you."

"But…"

"I ask that you reconsider. Many people want you to take the position. I also can't think of anymore more suitable than you, Father Lee Ki-Young."

"I'd appreciate it if you could give me some time to think," I requested.

"Yes, of course."

They were really persistent. I personally wanted to accept their offer and take that position, but there was a huge difference between taking up the position because I wanted to do so and taking up the position because I had no other choice. I was simply putting on a show, and the public's reactions were great as well.

Ki-Young Coin's prices would rise the more desperate they become.

Everything was perfect, and things were going smoothly.

The plan was for me to basically get *forced* into becoming the chairman of the committee, and I would manage the entire continent by then. I would provide an organized educational system and build forward operating bases in the north.

The plan was *almost* perfect.

"I'd appreciate it if you leave. I recall telling you that Mr. Ki-Young had no intentions of taking that position," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"But…"

"I'll see you out," he said.

Someone was ruining my plan.

'This guy… '

The guild members were against it, and Kim Hyun-Sung was at the helm of the opposition. Of course, I knew why he was against it.

'I will have to leave the Blue Guild if I become the chairman of the committee.'

I would have no choice but to abandon my position. I could probably keep my position as the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican, but I would have no choice but to give up my position as the Sub Guild Master of the Blue Guild to prevent any favoritism.

The Blue Guild would no longer have an obligation to protect me.

Lee Ki-Young's Guards would lose their jobs as well.

I was sure that the committee would assign bodyguards to me, but Kim Hyun-Sung was definitely nervous about entrusting my safety to bodyguards he hadn't personally curated.

However, Kim Hyun-Sung definitely knew that the position was necessary, so he was basically just throwing a tantrum.

Unfortunately, he wasn't the only problematic individual within the Blue Guild.

"…"

'She hasn't… grown at all.'

Jung Ha-Yan's growth had completely stopped.

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1. It's a pun that sounds like: Hey, buy me a drink. ☜

CHAPTER 557
OUR HA-YAN CHANGED (1)

"Ha-Yan," I said

"*Huh?* Yes?" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

"How are you doing these days?" I asked.

"I-I've been doing my best. The Devil's Guild has many interesting books, and there are many interesting things there…" she replied.

"Are there any issues?" I questioned.

"No. I-I don't think I ran into any issues… It's been the same every day. The people are treating me nicely… More importantly, they managed to keep their books safe even though Lindel ended up becoming a wasteland," she answered.

"*Hmm*…"

"W-What's wrong?" she asked.

"No, it's nothing. How about we go there together?" I suggested.

"Really?" she asked.

"Yeah, I've been curious about what you've been doing these days, and I haven't seen you in a while since I'm really busy. You've been doing well after our vacation, right?" I asked.

"Yes, I-I-I think I'm doing well. I am," she stuttered.

'I think it's best if I check this myself.'

Kim Hyun-Sung and the guild members' tantrums would eventually stop, and our regressor knew what he had to do. I just had to make a choice.

I was sure he knew better than anyone that the most trustworthy person had to become the chairman of the committee because they would be the overall manager of the continent.

Their objections were ephemeral, and he would end up agreeing to it.

I reckoned that his mind would change in just a month.

However, Jung Ha-Yan's growth issue was what surprised me the most.

'Why did she stop growing?'

Jung Ha-Yan's growth had never stopped before, and her growth was always unbelievable. However, her growth suddenly stopped, so I started doubting if I was still staring at the same Jung Ha-Yan whom I knew.

I examined her with my Mind's Eye and saw that she was still the same Jung Ha-Yan, but there was definitely something strange here. The talentless Park Deok-Gu's stats had increased by one point across the board, but Jung Ha-Yan's stats didn't increase at all.

'What is the Devil's Guild doing? Is there an issue? Is the Devil's Guild filled with a bunch of useless people?'

I couldn't help but think that I had made a mistake sending her to that guild for training.

'Why is this happening?'

Of course, there was no reason for me to panic because I still had a lot of time. Jung Ha-Yan was still considered really strong. However, her zero growth was bothering me, especially when I heard from Kim Hyun-Sung about how powerful Jung Ha-Yan was in his past life.

"She was a mage that could be considered the definition of magic itself. We wouldn't have been able to survive for so long if it hadn't been for her. She was so overpowered to the point that perhaps things would have worked out a bit easier if she were the regressor rather than me."

Those words were all I needed to hear. In addition, Jung Ha-Yan was the very first

person that Kim Hyun-Sung decided to recruit, and the former had no issues growing until now. She was also the only mage capable of casting teleportation magic, and she was the only mage who could pierce Semi-Mythic Magic Resistance.

"She was stronger back then than she is right now. She's still growing, so I don't think it would be a bad idea to send her to the Devil's Guild for training."

Jung Ha-Yan was all smiles; it seemed that she was happy about the idea of going out with me. This was the first time I spent time with her after we returned from our vacation. Of course, what we were doing was still part of our jobs, and it wasn't like we had other plans. Still, she was enjoying our time together.

We walked out of the temporary guild house, and I saw Lindel being restored. There were only a few people back then, but the city had already become livelier since then. I remember Heren becoming a tourist attraction, but Lindel was still the hometown of many adventurers, so Heren would be hard-pressed to defeat Lindel in that department.

The city was still in ruins, but I saw many people moving around. A few adventurers who were architects before being summoned pushed aside their livelihood to participate in the restoration project.

It was kind of a strange sight because there were some people screaming about the end of the world while the others were busy rebuilding the fallen city.

'We experienced many things.'

The Sacred Democratic Country would have collapsed long ago if its people could easily be swayed by such nonsense. We were still healing from the damage that the 27th Legion had done to us, but I believe we had gotten stronger from the ordeal.

We had become mentally stronger, and I could tell that the people of Lindel were proud that they managed to protect their land in the end.

"We're recruiting people to hunt!"

"The Soulmate Guild has moved to Heren! We want to sell these items quickly, so they're very cheap! Please come here and take a look!."

"Last call for those who want to visit Mirror Lake and Heren! The final destination is

Heren. A spot opened due to a last-minute cancellation. Please come here and join us!"

"We're recruiting party members willing to go to a Rare-ranked dungeon. We would appreciate a hyper carry!"

"We're selling Epic-ranked materials. We also have Average-ranked materials, so come here and take a look!"

"Blue Guild potions! We need money, so they're very cheap! Cheaper than market price!"

"I have the full volume of the revised edition of *How the Alchemist and the Genius Swordsman Loves—Ack!* Stop pushing! Stop pushing, please! Please place your bids!"

The square and the market were still being restored. People had set up tents, and the place looked like a flea market, but it didn't look that bad. What was important here was the fact that they all had smiles on their faces.

I saw people bowing toward me as I walked down the street with Jung Ha-Yan. Some said words of encouragement about the Continental Protection Management Committee, while some told me to hang in there.

I felt like a celebrity.

It was a peaceful scene. The denizens of the continent and the adventurers fervently discussed who deserved the chairman position of the committee as well as its members. Perhaps they lacked a sense of danger, but the mood was pretty good.

Humans would fight to protect those precious to them.

'The average level of the adventurers seems to have increased as well… '

Their stats compared to when they were fighting the 27th Legion had greatly increased, but of course, I was sure that their current stats couldn't compare to their stats during Kim Hyun-Sung's first life.

However, I was sure that the bastards from that terrible guild I temporarily partied with as Bitch Ki-Yeon no longer existed. Lee Chul-Woo and Kim Tae-Geon of the Friendship Guild had definitely grown a lot, and I could see the spite in their eyes.

They had to have endured hell-like training to survive, and they finally looked like veterans rather than greenhorns.

And that was why I was disappointed about Jung Ha-Yan's stagnation.

The other guild members also focused on training after our vacation. The mentally unstable Han Sora also grew a lot as an adventurer. She was starting to stabilize as well, and I could see her smiles often. I even got the feeling that she was no longer afraid of Jung Ha-Yan.

The others were growing and moving forward, but Jung Ha-Yan was stuck, which bothered me.

"I-It's over there. I ate lunch there with the members of the Devil's Guild." Jung Ha-Yan pointed.

"*Ahh*…"

"T-the food there is really delicious. I wanted to go there with you. I-I think we should go there today," she suggested.

"Was it that good?" I asked.

"Yes. The magic tower has changed a lot as well. It was restored quickly, and the magic tower itself has many interesting items," she replied.

"How do you usually train or study?" I asked.

"I'm on the highest floor of the magic tower. I told them that they didn't have to give the entire floor to me, but… they were too considerate. F-From what I heard, the top floor has the highest concentration of mana, so I usually stay there and read magic books s-since you told me to read more books…" she replied.

"Good job. Did you read a lot of books?" I asked.

"Out of the books they had there… *Hm*… A-About half," she answered.

"And you understood them?" I questioned.

"Yes. Some were difficult to understand, but…" she paused.

"*Hm*…"

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"No, it's nothing," I replied.

Jung Ha-Yan looked a bit nervous, and it seemed like she was worried that she had done something wrong because I was questioning her training method.

However, we weren't really in a situation where I could just tell her—I feel like your growth has stagnated, so I'm just asking you if you're doing fine. In addition, those words could affect her negatively if she was indeed in a slump.

'I wonder if she's just neglecting her studies.'

I thought that she had just gotten lazy because she was arguably the strongest mage on the continent., but it seemed that I had made a mistake after I started asking the people in the magic tower.

"Are you talking about Miss Jung Ha-Yan?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Aside from mealtimes, she'll always be in the tower. She'll always have a book with her during mealtimes, and she often skips meals. I'm actually starting to get worried about her, *hahaha.*"

"She's a blessing. The magic tower's mages are geniuses, but Miss Jung Ha-Yan is on a different level."

"The formula of her famous teleportation magic is really difficult to understand. She gave us hints, but we haven't really made any progress in our research… I think she's the incarnation of magic itself."

The old fogeys of the Devil's Guild were basically Jung Ha-Yan's fans, and they were treating her as if she were their granddaughters. I decided to ask more questions, but it seemed that Jung Ha-Yan's routine was fairly established.

I suspected that she was just pretending, but it didn't seem to be the case. I felt that she had become lazy, but I could tell from her messy room alone that she had been

working hard.

“We thought about asking someone to clean her room, but we decided against that in the end. Mages are often eccentric, so we think there’s a reason behind the mess. She even yelled at a new member of our guild because they tried to clean her room without asking for permission.

“Hahaha, I guess her magic research has been stressing her out because she threw things at them while yelling at them to get out. It seems that she’s also quite passionate in addition to her genius. She’s dope—really dope!”

It seemed that the old mage wanted to become closer to Jung Ha-Yan by using an old lingo to describe the latter. Unfortunately for him, the word dope had long been abandoned.

I had already basically confirmed the facts of Jung Ha-Yan’s routine, and she certainly appeared like a genius. I entered her room quietly and looked around. I found it familiar for some reason.

‘I guess this room resembles her room in her past life.’

Jung Ha-Yan was glancing at me while reading her book. I figured she was thinking about earning more brownie points by looking all serious while reading her book.

I looked around and saw books sprawled out all over the room.

[Understanding Basic Magic]

[What is High-ranking Magic?]

[In-depth Course on Magic]

[Things That Make Sense in Practice, But Not in Theory]

[1,023 Things About the Magic Law of the Continent]

[Magic Secrets Not Even the Archmage Knows About]

There were a variety of books on the floor. Some of them were still in circulation, while some books were ancient books that had been discovered in dungeons. They all had one thing in common—I couldn't understand them at all.

However, a few items caught my eye.

[Oppa1. avi]

[Oppa2. avi]

I wasn't sure what they were, but I frantically ignored them because Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she wanted to hide them as well by standing in front of them.

'It's not because of that, right?'

I felt like a parent who was worried about his child's education.

CHAPTER 558
OUR HA-YAN CHANGED (2)

'I think this is just a useless worry… '

There was no need to scold her because it was only natural for people to get stressed while studying, and people also needed to take a mental break from time to time. The method was a bit worrying, but it wasn't strange, so I didn't have to make a big deal out of it. It would be an issue if it got excessive, but it seemed like that wouldn't happen.

'I can't keep watching her to see if she's actually studying… '

I checked a few times, but I wanted to check again and make sure. I walked toward the group of old fogeys standing in front of Jung Ha-Yan's room as if her room was a sanctuary.

"Is she usually like this?" I asked.

"Yes, she spends a lot of time training. She won't even sleep sometimes. *Haha*."

"*Hmm*…"

"Her passion for magic is amazing. Is there… something you're not satisfied with?" an old fogey asked frantically.

"No, it's nothing like that. I'm just worried about her well-being… As you all know, this is her first time training in a magic tower. The tower has a vast amount of knowledge, so it's only right for us to send her here, but… I was worried that she was having a hard time adapting to this place…" I replied.

"She's adapting very well, so you don't have to worry about that. I'm certain she'll achieve something great soon. It can't be compared to the Blue Guild's investment in the Devil's Guild, but the Devil's Guild itself will provide an endless amount of physical and spiritual resources to the program, so just trust us," said the old fogey.

'I do trust you. How could I not?'

The Devil's Guild wasn't a huge guild, but it was filled with people who were talented and passionate about magic. The guild's infrastructure and curriculum to train mages were acknowledged by many mages as well. The Black Swan Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild also had a partnership with the Devil's Guild, and those two guilds would send their mages to train in the Devil's Guild.

There were even foreign nations requesting partnerships with them.

'The Devil's Guild isn't the first guild to house mages, but they are undeniably the best.'

No mage could teach Jung Ha-Yan. What she needed was an amazing facility to train in and a great as well as stable support group. She didn't need an amazing teacher. I actually didn't look too much into it because Jung Ha-Yan herself was the one who had established this institute in her past life.

"It looks like I made a rude comment, but of course, I trust the magic tower. Who would question the magic tower's credibility?" I said.

"*Haha*, it's fine. It'd be strange not to be worried. We believe that she's adapting fine, but… *Hmm*, if you feel that way as the Sub Guild Master of the Blue Guild, I guess she still needs more time to completely adapt to her new environment.

"More importantly, it must be fate that brought you here, so how about it? We'd like to hear your stories about alchemy. If you don't mind, we can discuss it over a cup of tea…" said one of the old fogeys.

'I knew it.'

These old fogeys were difficult to control with money, but a large amount of money could be enough to control them. However, the magic tower was currently filled with passionate scholars and mages.

I nodded at their suggestion, but I regretted it four hours later. It seemed that a cup of tea to them didn't mean a short amount of time.

"Are you saying there's no need to theorize a formula? But theory is an important part of the academic world…"

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan has never been bound to formulas. I believe she always thinks outside the box, and that is the reason why she managed to invent a brand-new spell. It’s not just the magic tower.

”Mages are focused on the knowledge that the system has provided for them. At this rate, it’ll be difficult for them to head toward a brighter future. They’ll eventually fall behind,” I explained.

“We have been doing that for a long time. Anyway, can we really compare Miss Jung Ha-Yan to ordinary people…” they questioned.

“I’m not suggesting that we completely throw away the methods we have been using up. Those methods are working, so we should keep using them. However, we should start working in a direction that would allow us to progress,” I replied.

I had no choice but to join the neverending debates of the old fogeys. I had no idea when we started talking about formulas and theories from alchemy and alchemy magic.

The old fogeys were in a heated debate, and they started raising their voices at topics unrelated to the original topic. They discussed the source of magic, possible ways to raise the output of spells, and the usefulness of non-offensive spells.

In the end, we ended up talking about formulas and theories.

The topic was if the theories that they had developed over the years were truly useful and effective. Jung Ha-Yan was probably the one who started the debate.

Unlike other mages, Jung Ha-Yan was the type of magic who would cast a spell first before creating its formula and the theories behind it. If I had to give an example, she would answer a math problem first before showing everyone how to solve it with a formula.

I could understand why the discussion was heated. Jung Ha-Yan had basically questioned their understanding of magic, after all.

I felt like running away upon seeing them raising their voices at each other. However, I remained seated and watched as Jung Ha-Yan talked to the old fogeys.
Unfortunately, her words weren’t exactly constructive.

“I think so…”

Or…

“No, that’s not true…”

Jung Ha-Yan only said either of those two phrases before backing up her words with formulas on the blackboards. The grandma and gramps wrote as fast as they could, seemingly afraid to miss even a single detail from Jung Ha-Yan’s formulas. They were in a heated debate with each other, but they were debating with Jung Ha-Yan as well.

One thing they all had in common was that they looked at her as if she were their granddaughter.

‘Jung Ha-Yan looks like she’s used to it as well.’

It wasn’t anything amazing, but it was interesting. I didn’t know exactly what Jung Ha-Yan had been doing in her past life, but based on the current atmosphere, I managed to make a few deductions.

Arguments were frequent everywhere, but I figured that arguments were the norm in the magic tower. I was sure Jung Ha-Yan had argued with these old fogeys here every day, and she had definitely spent her time enjoying the company of those who truly cared for her back in her previous life.

She was definitely still timid back then, but I was sure that she didn’t feel miserable here.

‘These people aren’t bad.’

They looked like they were only interested in magic. I couldn’t confirm it just yet, but I finally had a guess as to why Jung Ha-Yan stopped growing, and it was definitely not because of her environment.

“It’s already late.”

“*Kgh…* You’re right.”

“Let’s eat first since we have a guest… What do you think, Mr. Lee Ki-Young? If you’re okay with it, how about joining us for dinner…” said one of the old fogeys.

'I don't want to eat with you, man.'

"No, it's fine. I appreciate the offer, but I'd like to have dinner with Ha-Yan," I declined.

"*Hahaha*, it seems that I've been a bit dense today," they laughed.

'I think you've always been dense since you were born, not just today.'

"*Haha*…" I laughed.

"In that case, I'll have someone bring the food up to you," they said.

"Thank you."

I walked toward the highest floor of the tower.

"H-How was it?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Well…" I paused.

"T-They talked a lot, right? Mr. Park and Mr. Jang must've been happy because y-you're here. They seemed to be talking more than usual," she said.

"They all seemed like nice people," I commented.

"R-Right?" she stuttered.

"The atmosphere is nice… and I think it's better to train here than the Blue Guild. I like the fact that it creates a nice mood for people to study in," I told her.

And that was exactly why I was so confused about why she suddenly stopped growing. I liked how she was doing her best every day, and the atmosphere was better here as well compared to the atmosphere in the current Blue Guild.

In addition, there were also a lot more magic books here.

In other words, she was supposed to grow exponentially rather than stagnate.

'Should I throw in a bait?'

I thought perhaps she lacked purpose because my rewards to her had long become vague. Back then, we were just testing the water, but now, we often displayed our affection to the public, and we even touched each other a lot.

Jung Ha-Yan was also proudly wearing the ring on her left hand.

The magic elevator installed in the magic tower took me to the highest floor in the blink of an eye.

Soon, I was eating the food that the staffers had brought for us, but I couldn't focus on the meal at all.

'Should I wait and see? Or would it be better to tease her with a reward?'

Of course, her growth wasn't zero, but I was anxious about how her growth had become too slow. I stared at Jung Ha-Yan, and she smiled at me in return. The strange air between us made me feel nervous.

Jung Ha-Yan flinched when I grabbed her hand on the table. I started talking about many things, but her eyes seemed to be focused on my neck. To be exact, her eyes were unwittingly transfixed on my collarbones.

It was kind of scary to see her staring at my collarbones without blinking.

"I'm happy to see that you're working hard," I commented.

"Yes, I-I am working hard. I'm working really hard. T-Totally," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"I like this side of you, Ha-Yan," I told her.

"*Ah? Ah! Ah!"* she exclaimed.

"I find it charming," I added.

"*Ah! Ah!*" she yelled.

"It's kind of sexy as well," I continued.

"*Ah… uugh!*"

What's up with those weird noises?'

I lifted my hand slowly and tickled the back of her hand. Jung Ha-Yan shivered in response, and her pupils quivered ever so slightly as well. The slightly ajar door closed naturally, but there wasn't any wind up here, so it was clear who closed it.

I was worried that another Cha Hee-Ra incident would occur, but Jung Ha-Yan didn't do anything rash since she was different from the impulsive and decisive Cha Hee-Ra. She probably wanted to maintain her innocence that was acknowledged by a unicorn.

My hand went up to her upper arm. I grazed her neck before cupping her chin with my palm. I stroked her red cheek with my thumb, and she started breathing so loudly that I was afraid of people hearing her breathing.

Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my hand. I frowned briefly in pain, but I smiled soon enough.

Jung Ha-Yan probably thought that I was telling her something along the lines of—I'm very sexually attracted to you right now—Jung Ha-Yan seemed to be expecting something because I was showing her an expression that I had never shown her before.

However, it didn't take long for her expectation to shatter into pieces.

"Still…" I said.

"Yes? Yes! Yes!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

"You should focus on studying." I continued.

"*Ah… ah… ah…*"

"I don't want to disturb you," I told her.

"*Ah…* T-T-That's not t-t-true… That's not true… Y-You're not disturbing me at all…" she stuttered.

"I want to keep seeing this side of you. You understand what I'm saying, right?" I asked.

Jung Ha-Yan bit her lips.

CHAPTER 559
OUR HA-YAN CHANGED (3)

Jung Ha-Yan had become even more ravenous in her studies since then. She even refused to go back to the guild with me. She was definitely thinking that a scholarly look would make her look even more charming in her eyes because she started flipping pages while displaying her sexiest demeanor. It was definitely an amusing sight.

Of course, I didn't exactly agree that it was a *sexy* demeanor, but she seemed satisfied with her looks. She seemed to have regained some of her confidence as well. It felt like she had learned how to overcome her inferiority complex.

Her blushing face while she was reading a book intently was indeed an exciting sight, but I couldn't help but approach her again just to make her think that her presumption was right.

'You need to grow a lot.'

I was willing to do anything to help Jung Ha-Yan grow again. I was busy, but I made sure to make time for her at least once a week. I preferred staying in her room, but it was important to take her out as well for a change of pace. I would help her whenever she was hesitating and encourage her whenever she was feeling down.

I could still remember how happy and proud Jung Ha-Yan looked when I promised to take her out. She definitely thought that I had fallen completely in love with her intellectual side because she started carrying a book everywhere.

There weren't any immediate results, but I expected her to overcome this obstacle.

'I'll watch her a bit longer.'

Even the smallest growth was helpful, but her growth wasn't the only thing that piqued my interest.

"How's your training?" I asked.

“I’m not sure. I feel like I’m changing little by little, but… my stat hasn’t been increasing as much. Still, Hyun-Sung bro has been watching me, so you don’t have to worry too much,” Park Deok-Gu replied.

“I’m sure you can do better, Deok-Gu,” I encouraged him.

“Of course. I’m your little bro, after all,” he said with a smile.

The Continental Joint Training was going smoothly, along with Park Deok-Gu and the guild members’ training. The joint training had better results than I thought, and I figured it was all because of the recent events. The majority of the senior members in the training were warriors who had fought in the war with the 27th Legion, so Kim Hyun-Sung was delighted.

I was happy with the smooth training progress, but Kim Hyun-Sung was the happiest out of all of us. He reduced his own training time and helped the adventurers from other nations. He even taught those with enough potential by himself.

‘Communication is important.’

Obviously, this was the result of communication.

Kim Hyun-Sung and I started talking to each other without any facades.

It was uncomfortable, but we didn’t have issues giving our opinions.

Before any of these, I was like a wife who couldn’t do housework efficiently because I had no idea what my husband—Kim Hyun-Sung—was doing outside.

I wanted to help him because I was his *wife*, but I had no idea where to start.

I really wanted to take care of him, and I even came up with many different ideas.

However, I would hesitate and think about whether he would want me to do this or not when it was about time for me to do something. I knew the answer, but I had to pretend that I was clueless.

However, it was no longer the case—I didn’t have to pretend anymore.

Kim Hyun-Sung readily told me what he needed, and my job was to take care of it. He

would still feel bad whenever he made special requests, but he was relaxed and calm in my eyes, which proved that he truly trusted me.

Anyway, the ability to do many things at the same time was the greatest thing here.

The time I had been spending to read Kim Hyun-Sung's thoughts could now be spent on other things.

[Yes, this is an issue, so please check up on the overall training progress. If you're busy, you can refuse. I would also like to make a comment about the mental training you mentioned… I think it's best if you think about the Continental Protection Management Committee again… There's really no need for you to take that responsibility. Of course, I know that it'll be really beneficial to us, but it comes with too many responsibilities…]

"Still, I have no choice but to do it."

'I'll have to check out the training myself… I don't think that there are going to be issues since they seem to be doing fine.'

I placed the letter in the drawer after reading it.

There were other communication methods, but he was still writing me letters, which made me think that he probably still wasn't used to the advanced technology of this life, but the letter didn't really contain any important information.

There was a knock on the door, and I told them to come in. The door opened, revealing an individual whom I was seeing more often than Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan.

"Miss Kim Mi-Young," I greeted.

"I'm sorry, Sub Guild Master. I should've come here earlier," Kim Mi-Young said.

"No, it's fine. You have never been late. I just woke up earlier than usual today, so there's no need for you to apologize. You worked late last night as well," I told her.

'She makes my work a lot easier.'

"It wasn't that late…" she commented.

“If two in the morning isn’t considered late, what time is considered late? Of course, you’ll get paid overtime… I’m giving you benefits based on your performance as well as bonuses, I still feel uncomfortable about the idea of making you work late into the night.”

You’ve done so much for me. I appreciate your worries, but you don’t have to take care of me to that extent. You’re basically my benefactor,” she said.

“I didn’t do anything. All I did was recruit a person with skills. By the way… how are your children doing these days?” I asked.

“They’ve been saying that they want to become adventurers…” she replied.

“…”

“I’m sure… you’re worried,” I said.

“It’s great that they would become strong enough to protect themselves, but… as their mother, I’m kind of worried…” she confessed.

“This will sound harsh, but it’s safer to wield a sword rather than a pen on this continent. If your children are sure that they want to become adventurers, I don’t think it’s a bad idea to sign them up for the Blue Guild’s youth program.

”It’ll be a lot better than having them start at a normal dungeon with nothing. I’ll notify the person in charge, so let me know once you’ve made your decision,” I told her.

“Thank you.”

“You don’t need to thank me every time. Now…” I trailed off.

“I didn’t schedule anything since you’re going out with Miss Jung Ha-Yan today. The things I need your confirmation on are the northern outpost construction plan and…” she went on.

“Let’s take a look,” I said.

“Okay.”

"…"

"It'll take four years to complete…" I mumbled.

"The plan's priority is speed, but the scale and the quality make it difficult to shorten it even further. I think this is a reasonable time frame. I'm worried that issues might pop up if we were to shorten it even further."

"We also don't have enough mana stones to use on the outpost. We have been mining as fast as possible, but the mineral involved cannot be mined in large amounts. We have also received many complaints from the miners."

"We could hasten the construction of the walls, but I'm worried about the towers…"

"I know that building things as fast as possible isn't the best course of action, but I'd like it if we could speed it up just a bit more. If mana stones are the issue, we can borrow labor from the nations in the north. I think we also need to improve the tools that the miners are using. I think it's best if we ask Miss Ah-Young's opinion about it," I said.

"We have consulted the nations in the north about labor, but there are many different issues," she informed.

"*Hm…*"

"I'll come up with a solution," she offered.

"I think it's best if I look into it as well. I know it's difficult, but I'd like to get it done in three years… Anyway, thank you for your hard work. I'll provide detailed comments by tomorrow. I still have to take a closer look at the plan after all," I said.

"Okay."

"Now… what's next?" I asked.

"I'm planning on scheduling a meeting with the management committee…" she answered.

"Ah, right. I was actually thinking about getting started on that. I'll leave that up to you. I'd appreciate it if you could focus on the press a bit more," I requested.

“Okay, I’ll make sure to check it out,” she said.

Kim Mi-Young reported on many things.

She was definitely good at getting things done. Her current job wasn’t her specialty, but I couldn’t help but think that I had recruited the right person considering the results she was bringing to the Blue Guild. I was sure she would assign less sensitive matters to her team, which would maximize her efficiency.

In other words, she was the best staffer of the Blue Guild. She was also really good at her job, which made me think that she probably had a cheat key or something.

“That’s all I have to report. I believe Miss Jung Ha-Yan is waiting for you outside… Should I tell her to come in?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“No, it’s fine. Let’s go out together. I think that’s better… *Ah*, good work today,” I complimented her.

“Thank you.”

Kim Mi-Young raised her glasses slightly with her finger. I couldn’t help but think that perhaps Jung Ha-Yan wanted to look like Kim Mi-Young, who was an intelligent career woman.

I was worried that Jung Ha-Yan would explode if she saw Kim Mi-Young and me walking together, but Jung Ha-Yan had gotten cautious about her actions, so I was certain that she wouldn’t kick up a fuss.

We walked outside and saw Jung Ha-Yan sitting on a bench with Han Sora. It was a strange sight, but it definitely looked natural in the eyes of other people. Han Sora’s smile looked extremely natural as well.

It seemed that a calm Jung Ha-Yan was a pleasant person to talk to because I had never seen such a smile on Han Sora’s lips before.

Jung Ha-Yan noticed me, and she started waving at me.

I knew it; she was holding an ancient-looking book in her hand and was wearing a pair of red glasses. I almost smiled at her cute look, but I decided to greet her as usual because I was worried that my smile would offend her.

"*Ah.*"

Kim Mi-Young suddenly fell forward. She tripped on her own feet, and my arms instinctively reached out to catch her.

"Thank you, Sub Guild Master," Kim Mi-Young said.

"I knew it, you're tired. Don't do anything else today. Just go home and rest," I ordered.

"Okay."

"I'm serious," I warned her.

"Yes, I'll definitely follow your orders…" she said.

I finally realized that my hands were still on her waist. I pulled my hands back in surprise because Jung Ha-Yan was watching us. I was worried that she would do something because Kim Mi-Young's looks were the looks that Jung Ha-Yan wanted to replicate.

The type of woman whom Jung Ha-Yan thought was my type suddenly fell into my arms. Jung Ha-Yan had become more sensible since the kidnapping incident, but she was still Jung Ha-Yan.

As expected, I heard her stutter.

"M-miss Kim Mi-Young, a-are you okay?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Yes, thank you," Kim Mi-Young replied.

'What's going on?'

"T-That's a relief," she stuttered.

'What's wrong with you, damn it? You're scaring me.'

"You should be careful…" she warned.

'Seriously, what's wrong with you, Ha-Yan? Don't… do this, please. You're scaring me.'

I wasn't sure whether she was being honest or not, but Jung Ha-Yan seemed worried about Kim Mi-Young. Han Sora was surprised by the turn of events, but she soon smiled without saying anything.

It seemed that Jung Ha-Yan had stagnated in that department as well…

CHAPTER 560
OUR HA-YAN CHANGED(4)

“Are you talking about Miss Jung Ha-Yan?” Han Sora asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“She's been really quiet recently, and she has also become really kind. She’s taking care of me as well… I was kind of scared of her because of what happened a long time ago, but she hasn’t really behaved that way recently. Her… eyes don’t look strange anymore. I’m not sure if she has become more patient or perhaps she realized something,” she answered.

“She definitely has gotten quieter…” I mumbled.

“While we’re on the topic…” Han Sora trailed off.

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry for being fickle, but… you don’t have to submit the transfer request. I’m comfortable here and… I like being in Lindel now,” she continued.

“I understand, Miss Sora,” I said.

‘I wasn’t planning on submitting it in the first place… ’

I was actually happy that she told me that herself, but the goal of this conversation wasn’t about her transfer request.

‘If even Han Sora is vouching for her, it seems that she really has changed… ’

I was obviously talking about Jung Ha-Yan’s tendencies. She had erupted a few times before, but there were impetuses behind her eruptions. Still, I couldn’t just stand idly by and let her continue with her tendencies.

We were preparing for war by setting up an outpost in the north and deciding who

should be on the Continental Protection Management Committee. Those two were important, but the growth of mankind's secret weapon was important as well.

I wasn't sure how Han Sora felt about Jung Ha-Yan, but Jung Ha-Yan thought of her as a friend. Han Sora had always been by her side whenever there were issues, so Jung Ha-Yan probably thought of Han Sora as a close friend.

Jung Ha-Yan probably had a lot of trust in Han Sora.

I thought Han Sora would still be scared of Jung Ha-Yan, but it seemed that Han Sora was no longer afraid of Jung Ha-Yan. It became even more obvious to me after we left Mirror Lake.

'She definitely changed, but it's strange.'

I knew Jung Ha-Yan would mature after the kidnapping incident, but it was still strange to see her actually grow up. I wasn't sure if I hadn't caught on or unknowingly overlooked it, but I had to admit that she had changed.

'The magic tower... '

Now that I thought about it, the past Jung Ha-Yan would have been dissatisfied about being stuck in the tower all day. I made sure to go out with her once a week, but the past Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't have been satisfied with that.

Of course, there were times when she showed me that she was holding herself back, but I still found her change a bit confusing.

She hadn't been throwing a tantrum whenever I met Hee-Ra noona, even though Hee-Ra noona could be considered the woman she despised the most. She was still trembling and was still biting her lips, but she didn't do anything rash.

She hadn't been forcing me to go with her as well, and she hadn't been insisting on going out with me whenever I had to go somewhere for work. Whenever I had to talk to other women, she would obediently watch our interaction from a distance.

It was the same with the Continental Protection Management Committee issue. I would have to leave the guild temporarily and head north. It was news that should have been heartbroken for Jung Ha-Yan, but I couldn't see any signs of her causing trouble.

'Maybe she's thinking that she can't afford to cause any more trouble… '

Jung Ha-Yan had to have noticed that certain behaviors of hers could bring about a negative result. There were surely more complex reasons behind her current attitude, but there was no need for me to dig deeper.

The crux here was that the kidnapping incident had changed Jung Ha-Yan, but it was basically what I wanted in the first place. I wanted a Jung Ha-Yan that wouldn't act unpredictably. There was nothing more charming than that.

However, my head started to ache when I thought about how the kidnapping incident had changed Jung Ha-Yan's mentality as well.

"Is something wrong, Sub Guild Master?" Han Sora asked.

"No, it's nothing. Have you noticed anything out of the ordinary recently…" I asked.

"No, I haven't noticed anything. She seemed stressed that her studies weren't going as well as she thought, but… I haven't noticed any other issues. Well, it's strange that she brings a book with her whenever you call her," she answered.

"*Hm…*"

"And…" she paused.

"Yes?"

"I'm not sure if this is the right way to describe it, but…" she paused again.

"Go on," I told her.

"She seems like she's struggling," she continued.

"…"

"Actually, it would be better to say that she seems bored rather than that she's struggling," she said.

"She's bored? Is the magic tower's level that low?" I questioned.

“No, that’s not what I meant. I don’t think she feels excited about magic itself. It feels like she’s studying because she has to—Honestly, not many people enjoy studying magic, but… she seemed to have gotten less excited about magic. It’s like she’s forcing herself to sit in the chair and study…” she explained.

“That can’t be…” I mumbled.

‘She doesn’t like studying?’

“I’m not sure, but it looks like that to me,” she commented.

“I see. Thank you,” I said.

“…”

“…”

‘Jung Ha-Yan doesn’t feel happy about studying magic?’

“Excuse me, Sub Guild Master,” Han Sora called out.

“Yes?”

“I know you’re busy, but… if… you could visit Miss Jung Ha-Yan often…” she requested.

“I understand,” I answered.

“I-I’ll be on my way now,” she stuttered.

“I’ll call her again in a few days, so try to avoid going on missions that are far from here,” I ordered her.

“Okay.”

‘Why is she getting bored of magic? She really enjoyed studying back then… ’

I abruptly stood up. *‘Wait, that can’t be it. Is that really it?’*

The idea that Jung Ha-Yan was getting bored of magic was ridiculous. Magic was Jung

Ha-Yan's raison d'etre. It was her stress relief, and it brought excitement to her life. She would relieve her stress by reading ancient books about magic, and whenever she was lonely or tired, she would come up with absurd, amusing magic spells to have fun.

Magic was her only friend as well. If I were to exaggerate it, mana and magic were her only friends, but…

"*Ah…"*

'This… ' I finally discovered something so obvious. *'This isn't her past life.'*

Jung Ha-Yan wasn't lonely, nor did she think that magic was her only friend.

'She probably just considers magic as an occupational skill.'

Jung Ha-Yan was like a hermit of the magic tower in her past life. She spent most of her waking hours on the top floor of the magic tower. I was sure that the old fogeys entertained her, but Jung Ha-Yan definitely still felt lonely back then.

Perhaps that was why she considered mana and magic her only friends, which created a synergy with her innate talent. She was also extremely passionate about magic back then, but…

'This isn't her past life, and her current situation is different from her situation back then.''

I figured that my very existence was the issue here.

The past Jung Ha-Yan treated magic as her goal, but the current Jung Ha-Yan's goal was me. Magic was her everything in her past life, but the current Jung Ha-Yan thought of me as her everything.

Whenever she encountered issues in her past life, she would use magic to resolve them. However, she had only been relying on me in her current life. Jung Ha-Yan treated magic as nothing more than an occupational skill, and I figured that her current mindset was the reason she was starting to get bored of magic.

It was all because her goal and magic itself didn't really align.

'Does that mean she'll be a weaker mage here than in her past life?'

I didn't think so. Jung Ha-Yan had already achieved many things in this life, and both mana and magic still loved her dearly.

'The issue here is that she wasn't reciprocating their feelings… '

I sighed at the conclusion I reached. I couldn't save Jung Ha-Yan from such a quagmire, and she wouldn't grow even if I wanted her to grow. I had to awaken her if I wanted her to grow even more.

I had to find the keywords that would awaken her growth, but it didn't take me that long to discover what those keywords were—anger, jealousy, and negative emotions—these three had been the impetus for Jung Ha-Yan's growth rather than training.

Her anger toward Cha Hee-Ra, Jin Cheong, the Federation, and the demons bolstered her growth and allowed her to reach greater heights. In other words, she would skip a few tiers to tackle a monumental issue.

Jung Ha-Yan's self-esteem plummeted because of the kidnapping incident, which meant that she hadn't been able to fully express the negative emotions inside of her, leading to her stunted growth.

'Why is my child so discouraged?'

I had been working hard to put a leash on Jung Ha-Yan. I finally succeeded, but she became a pet rather than a hunting dog. Her fury and ravenous desire to destroy her rivals had become the reason for her low self-esteem.

In other words, her anger, jealousy, and negative emotions became compromise, resilience, and perseverance.

'Damn it… What should I do?'

"Shit…"

'Should I remove the leash from her?'

"I worked so hard to put that on her…"

'Can we win the upcoming crisis without Jung Ha-Yan?'

"No… Kim Hyun-Sung himself recruited her for the crisis. Damn it."

'What the hell am I supposed to do?'

"I honestly don't know."

'This might be better even for Ha-Yan… '

I wasn't just trying to satisfy my personal greed here. Jung Ha-Yan was clearly becoming gentle. She was slowly building her social skills while hanging out with Han Sora, and she was slowly but surely developing as a better person.

However, I wanted her to go back to her old self in the tutorial dungeon, and I figured that perhaps this was my final chance to do so.

I felt a bit guilty at the thought of turning Jung Ha-Yan into that kind of person, but it was a bit tough. I had to choose between the weak and stable Jung Ha-Yan or the extremely strong but difficult-to-control Jung Ha-Yan.

I finally understood why she had been having issues selecting between the scholarly oppa with glasses and the oppa who could harness the power of darkness. It was a bit unfortunate, but it had already been decided.

One month later, I made up my mind and said, "Let's spend some time apart."

"What?" Jung Ha-Yan doubted her ears.

"I need some time to myself…" I told her.

It was definitely like a bolt from the blue for her, and I was sure that even Han Sora would be surprised.

CHAPTER 561
SOWING THE SEED (1)

“W-w-w-hy a-a-all of a sudden?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“It’s difficult for me to say this, but it’s time for me to start focusing… and it’s time for you to focus on your studies…” I replied.

“…”

“You know why, right?” I questioned.

“Yes, o-of course… of course I know. I do,” she replied.

“We’re already busy, but we’re going to get even busier. The incident with the 27th Legion shouldn’t happen again,” I told her.

“Yes… y-you’re right… that shouldn’t happen a-a-again,” she muttered.

“I really want to stay next to you every day, but I think it’ll be helpful for both of us if we stop seeing each other until we’ve laid a solid enough foundation. We need to get ready for the upcoming crisis. Otherwise, we would have a hard time in the future. It’ll be hard for both of us, you understand me, right?” I asked.

“…”

Jung Ha-Yan was trembling. She looked like she was about to erupt in fury, which made me gulp. I had already diagnosed her, but I still couldn’t say for sure just how she would react. However, she would probably…

“I-I-I understand… I… understand…” she stuttered.

I saw her desperately trying to hold back her tears. She clenched her fists while trembling like a vibrating cell phone. Her mind was desperately trying to hold her back, but I felt nervous seeing her quiver.

'I don't think it would be a bad idea to say that we've lost our spark… '

I didn't want to give her a lot of pain because we were just getting started. I was sure that my words just now were shocking enough. Jung Ha-Yan had to harness the awakening keywords to grow, but if I were to make her think that I was breaking up with her, there was a high chance that she would explode.

I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to handle the fallout of such an event. The chance was low, but it existed. However, I was more worried that she would make the same radical decision that she had made in her past life.

My words just now were definitely enough to disturb Jung Ha-Yan. We were busy, but we could still see each other, but now, she had no idea when we would meet once again, and the waiting time would definitely feel like an eternity for her.

It was a great idea to slowly remove the leash I had put on her rather than removing it all at once. For example, if I were to tell her that I was no longer interested in her, then…

'It could really go downhill.'

The most important part here was to make Jung Ha-Yan angry enough to grow.

"S-S-Still…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"I'll probably head north within this week at the earliest," I informed her.

"What? This week?" she asked.

"Yeah. I'm sorry for not telling you earlier. It was a very sudden decision, and I didn't have time to think about it… They're going to start building the outpost tomorrow. In addition to the plan, I also need to check out the nation because I'm sure there are many confused people there. I should help them sort things out," I answered.

"I can move and study there, too. I-I-It'll be more comfortable for me," she stuttered.

"You have things to do here." I pointed out.

"I-I-I-I do. Then… c-can I v-visit you once in a while? Just for a moment…" she asked.

“I’d like you to stay in Lindel until I contact you,” I instructed.

“That’s… too…”

‘Harsh.’

I knew it was harsh, and it was even harsher because I knew about the abuse Jung Ha-Yan had experienced back on Earth.

I felt really bad.

I was sure she had been thinking that I would no longer abandon her, but Jung Ha-Yan had always found it difficult to be completely certain of something.

Tears started to fall out of her eyes, and I looked at her with a sad gaze.

I opened my arms quietly, and Jung Ha-Yan hugged me tightly.

I heard a cracking noise from my body when she tightened her hug, but I ended it by patting her head. I couldn’t help but think that I was about to go and join the army or study abroad while I stood there in silence and listened to her hiccups.

This was an unrealistic scene that often appeared in dramas, but I wasn’t lying when I told her that I was about to get even busier

‘The timing is perfect, too.’

I was actually planning on going to the north anyway, and I couldn’t take Jung Ha-Yan with me. It would be more comfortable for me to take her with me, but there were too many cons compared to the pros.

We would profit more from hodling rather than selling.

Soon, I lightly pushed Jung Ha-Yan away, but she wouldn’t budge.

“Everyone is doing their best, so you should do your best, too,” I told her.

‘At least you’ve been seeing me once a week… ’

“*Kgh…* okay,” she said.

“If you need anything, feel free to ask Miss Kim Mi-Young. I’ll send you letters or videos, so don’t be too disappointed,” I added.

“*Kgh… kgh… Hiccup…* Okay.”

“I don’t want to be apart from you either, Ha-Yan, but we have no choice,” I said.

“*Hiccup…* Okay… T-Then when can I see you?” she asked.

“Once I’m almost done with my current project…” I replied.

“Okay.”

“And when your training is over,” I added.

“W-When will my training end?” she asked.

“I’m sure you’ll figure that one out on your own. You know that, right?” I answered.

“Y-Yes… *Hiccup*!” she answered.

“You don’t have to see me off, so you should go ahead and return to the tower,” I instructed her.

“Still…” she mumbled.

“It’s okay. I’ll drop you off,” I said.

“*Kggh…*”

‘She’s enduring it pretty well. I’m really surprised.’

I was convinced that Jung Ha-Yan already knew what I was talking about. She was anxious, but she had definitely realized that she had stopped growing. I wasn’t exactly sure why she stopped growing, but she probably needed a change of pace.

At this point, it would be nice if she thought that all this was happening because of the Outer God Fragment or whatever because she would definitely grow tremendously with a target in mind.

'I think… '

I thought it would be better for her to become obsessed with growth until I was satisfied with her progress. She had to focus on her studies to do that, and if my actions today became the reason for her massive growth in the future…

'I would be really happy.'

I had even tried seducing her to no avail, so I figured that such a thing wasn't enough to serve as the impetus for her growth. I was sure that she would be the most frustrated once she discovered that she was in a bottleneck.

Jung Ha-Yan had been studying all this time, so she was probably thinking that it wouldn't be that long for her to complete her studies.

In other words, I was convinced that she was enduring it well because she thought that she just had to put in a bit more effort than usual into her studies.

However, what if she was still not growing even after a few months? Wouldn't she become anxious by then? Her frustration would eventually explode, and she would start looking for the reason why.

In the end, she would examine herself more closely and hopefully find a brand-new method to grow, just like what she had done in her previous bottlenecks.

'I'm kind of worried about letting it end here… '

I would like to closely observe Jung Ha-Yan's progress, but the issue here was that I couldn't just focus on her.

"I-I-I'll call you," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Okay. Go in, Ha-Yan," I told her.

"Okay…" she mumbled.

"Make sure to send me videos regularly," I reminded her.

"I'll make sure to send them. N-N-No matter what. *Kgh*…" she answered.

Jung Ha-Yan wasn't the only one who needed time to themselves. I barely managed to send Jung Ha-Yan back to the magic tower after some effort.

I then headed toward the guild to gather my luggage. It was difficult for me to look away because I kept hearing her hiccups, but I had to remain steadfast.

The desolate Blue Guild welcomed me upon my arrival. The guild felt empty—no, it was empty because Kim Hyun-Sung and Jo Hye-Jin were supervising the joint training.

The guild also didn't really have that many members, so it was easy to spot who wasn't in the guild.

I was about to walk into the hall, but I saw Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo exiting the hall.

I thought they were going on an expedition or something because I saw them carrying really huge bags. I was curious, so I decided to ask them, but Park Deok-Gu beat me to the chase.

"Hyung-nim, are you heading north?"

"Are you coming with me?" I asked.

"No, it's nothing like that," Park Deok-Gu replied.

"Then what's going on?" I questioned.

"I just feel like I'm stuck," he answered.

"Are you going on an expedition? I don't recall any dungeons being reported… Is it just going to be you and Mr. Ki-Mo? Did you submit the request to dispatch personnel to the three guilds? Who was chosen? Does the Red Mercenary and the Black Swan still have the manpower to spare for an expedition?" I asked.

"No, it's not an expedition. We're just going to explore the world a bit," he replied.

"What kind of ridiculous answer is that? I'm sure you've already heard, but there's—
"

“I know what you’re worried about, hyung-nim.” Park Deok-Gu interrupted and said, “We’re not going out to have fun or anything, so don’t worry. This thought just popped into my head when I felt like I was in a bottleneck.

”I feel like I’ve been growing pretty comfortably by staying here. As you mentioned earlier… I felt like I’ve been growing while being under yours, the guild master, and our noonim’s care.”

“…”

“I know it sounds absurd to you, but if I were to exaggerate, I’m leaving to train and reach greater heights. The bro is focused on the joint training, noonim is at the magic tower, and you’re leaving for the north soon, so—wait, we all have reasons to leave, so the timing is perfect, I guess,” he said.

“…”

“I’m not the same untrustworthy little bro you met in the tutorial dungeon, hyung-nim. Don’t worry about me,” he added.

“…”

“…”

‘I’m not worried, and I’m not really in the place to make a comment about your problems… Well… all right. Have a safe trip. Don’t forget. If I can do it…” I trailed off.

“I can do even better. I engraved those words on my heart a long time ago, hyung-nim, so you can stop saying them,” he replied.

“You have a safe trip as well, Mr. Ki-Mo,” I told him.

“*Hahaha*, thank you, Sub Guild Master. We’ll return once we feel like we’ve made some progress. Let’s go, Mr. Deok-Gu,” he said.

‘Looks like everyone has a plan.’

I realized that they were no longer rookies that I had to spoon-feed. They knew what they had to do to grow, but I was still worried about it.

However…

‘This isn’t so bad… ’

Deok-Gu Coin was a great coin to hodl because he wasn’t really making any progress here anymore. In other words, it was better to let him find the answer on his own. Of course, I was still uncomfortable at the fact that we would be far away from each other.

CHAPTER 562
SOWING THE SEED (2)

'Does it have anything to do with my departure from the Blue Guild?'

I thought that wasn't the case, but I got a bit worried because both Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo had told me that they would explore the world outside. It was a common occurrence in small to mid-sized guilds or parties, but it wasn't caused by conflicts.

It wasn't strange for parties and guilds of that size to disband if the core member of the guild decided to leave. They would drift apart, and the guild would eventually disband.

However, it wasn't happening as frequently as back then because a new way to communicate had already become ubiquitous throughout the continent. However, I still couldn't help but get worried that the Blue Guild was walking down that path.

The answer wasn't that difficult to find if one were to think about what my existence meant to the Blue Guild. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that I had done more for the Blue Guild than Kim Hyun-Sung.

Jung Ha-Yan, Park Deok-Gu, Sun Hee-Young, Elena, Yoo Ah-Young, and Ahn Ki-Mo were people I had recruited for the Blue Guild.

I wasn't sure about Yoo Ah-Young and Ahn Ki-Mo, but I was sure that Ha-Yan, Deok-Gu, Hee-Young, and Elena would leave the Blue Guild with me.

And that was why I felt a sense of foreboding when Elena suddenly visited me, but her words made sense, so I nodded in agreement.

"I think I have to go to the kingdom and stay there for a while," Elena said.

"…"

"I have to tell my father about the issues concerning the World Tree. I have to supervise the troops as well. I also think that I'll be more helpful over there…" she

continued.

"*Ah*, that's true. There's a big difference between being near the World Tree and being away from it when it comes to you…" I commented.

"Elune has also been telling me that we won't be able to overcome the upcoming threat at this rate.

"I'll stay in the Blue Guild no matter what if you decide to stay in the Blue Guild, but since you're withdrawing from the guild to manage the continent, I think it's best for me to stay near the World Tree as well. My growth will become a bit faster there, and I can also lead our troops better if I go there and build a rapport with them," she explained.

"Yes, I'm sure you're right," I said.

"I'm going to return someday, but I don't know. It's really hard for me to leave. It's not like I'm leaving right now, and it's not like I won't see you ever again, but I hope you understand why I'm crying," she said.

"…"

"Thank you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Your arms are really warm," she said.

"When are you going to leave?" I asked.

"I'll probably leave right away along with Miss Ah-Young," I replied.

"*Ah…*"

"She's going to the dwarves to learn more about her job. We're heading in the same direction, so we'll depart together," she said.

'It's not a bad choice.'

"There's really no need for me to move this fast, but I think I'll just get depressed if I were to stay here without you… I'll be sure to head north once I'm done with my task," she told me.

"Okay, I'll be waiting for you," I said.

'I was planning on sending Yoo Ah-Young to the dwarves, but did Elena really not influence her?'

I figured that the two had to have thought about their decision over an extended period of time, and they figured out that this was the best decision to make. An elf would grow faster the closer they were to the World Tree.

Elune had abandoned her, but Elena was still Elune's daughter. Elune's temple was also located near the World Tree, so staying there would be like a double-growth event for Elena.

Yoo Ah-Young's decision wasn't really strange because she was a blacksmith. It was only natural for her to be curious about the dwarves.

Yoo Ah-Young also had to provide high-quality weapons and armor to everyone, so she needed a bigger workshop. The Blue Guild could pour a ton of money into creating Yoo Ah-Young's workshop, but it couldn't possibly beat the dwarves' workshops.

Yoo Ah-Young had to leave to grow and spread her wings. I was taken aback to hear Elena's words because Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo had just departed. However, their decision to leave for the Kingdom of Others was definitely the right decision.

"The guild feels a bit empty recently. Deok-Gu and Mr. Ki-Mo had just left the guild as well," I said.

"*Ah*, I'm sorry. I think I should at least stay here…" Elena apologized.

"No, it's fine. Miss Kim Mi-Young has been handling our internal affairs. Miss Hye-Jin has also been working hard on the joint training, so I think it's best if you return to your kingdom. I know you'll be sad to hear this, but… you've made a great decision," I said.

"I would follow you in a heartbeat if you ask me to go with you up north… It's a shame, but…" she trailed off.

"Yes, it's a shame that it's an extremely important task," I said.

"*Hehe*, yes, it is," she agreed with a chuckle.

Elena stood on her toes, and I felt something soft on my lips.

Elena smiled brightly at me.

She was different from Jung Ha-Yan, who cried until we parted, but it seemed that she ended up crying as well because she looked away and tried to discreetly wipe her tears away with her sleeve.

"I-I'll head out first. You don't have to see me out. Actually, I would prefer it if you don't do that. If you see me out, I may waver and stay here…" she requested.

"All right, Miss Elena. I'll make sure to contact you from time to time," I said.

"Yes… I'll also contact you when I can," Elena said.

Just like that, Elena and Yoo Ah-Young temporarily left the Blue Guild.

'I feel kind of uncomfortable. No… I feel really restless.'

Kim Hyun-Sung and Jo Hye-Jin's departure didn't bother me that much, and the guild also didn't feel that empty back then. Kim Hyun-Sung had been sending letters every day as well. His recent letter said that he would focus on training.

Meanwhile, Jo Hye-Jin started giving me updates on her life as well.

'I think I just haven't noticed until now… '

I was really busy to focus on everything around me. I wasn't sure if this was the right way to describe it, but the guild seemed more desolate than ever.

'No wonder the guild is so quiet.'

Or…

'I haven't really talked to them that much recently.'

These were the thoughts that popped into my head. Park Deok-Gu's departure was the biggest reason why the guild had become so quiet, but…

'Jung Ha-Yan is at the magic tower… '

Cha Hee-Ra was an outsider, but she had been visiting the guild often as if it were her home. However, she had made the decision to do some training and lock herself up in a cave. Her behavior wasn't strange because she was Cha Hee-Ra, but I was surprised upon belatedly hearing the news.

'Who's still in the guild?'

Kim Ye-Ri and Lee Chang-Ryeol were always up to something, so they were out, which meant that Sun Hee-Young was the only person here, but…

'She's always busy doing her own things.'

I honestly didn't expect that the desolate guild house would bother me this much, but I didn't really care about having a sense of belonging. However, I suddenly felt like I truly belonged to this guild now that everyone had departed to do their own things.

I was worried that the party members would leave the guild rather than the guild's decline itself.

'It's strange.'

I thought that it was probably because we had overcome many life-or-death situations, but I soon figured out that I had already grown fond of them. The primary reason behind that was most likely the many hours I had spent with them.

My emotional and sentimental side would have rejected the idea of allowing the party members to scatter and grow on their own. However, my rational side knew that this was necessary because there was no one-size-fits-all.

The party members weren't idiots as well.

Park Deok-Gu had to have realized that he wouldn't be able to overcome the wall blocking his growth if he were to stay under the guild's protection, while Ahn Ki-Mo believed that following Park Deok-Gu would be beneficial for him.

Ahn Ki-Mo was a priest, but he was the type of priest who had no issues standing on the vanguard, so he probably thought that he would learn a lot from Park Deok-Gu. As for Elena, she simply wanted to become even stronger by staying near the World Tree.

Meanwhile, Yoo Ah-Young probably thought that she had to train with the dwarves to take a great leap forward. Jung Ha-Yan was the same. She still hadn't realized it, but the Dark World Jung Ha-Yan would have already locked herself up in the magic tower.

They couldn't really help with the Continental Joint Training, the outpost construction, and the Continental Protection Management Committee, so they probably made their decisions with that fact in mind. I hadn't emphasized it, but Elena's return to her kingdom would be politically helpful as well.

'I should be happy.'

After all, I was sowing the seeds here.

I got ready to leave. I had to focus on my task at hand before I could start having complicated thoughts. I decided to spend a bit more time with Sun Hee-Young and Hwang Jung-Yeon before leaving the guild.

Park Lian and a few attendants left with me. I thought it would be better if I left by myself, but the guild wouldn't allow it. Kim Hyun-Sung forced me to leave with Park Lian of the Dual Blade and a few attendants.

I wasn't really that annoyed that I had companions because they were like insurance if something were to happen. There was also a high chance that something would happen.

I saw someone that I didn't expect to stumble upon.

"Are you heading north?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"Yeah, I have to be prepared. By the way, I thought you were busy, noona. You ignored me whenever I visited you… I thought you didn't even have time to eat because you're so busy with the inauguration of the committee," I said.

"I decided to make time because my honey is leaving," she replied.

"It's not like we're not going to see each other anymore. Aren't you going to the north as well?" I asked.

"It's going to take me about three months—perhaps more because this place needs a leader. Miss Kim Mi-Young is here, but there's only so much she can handle," she

answered.

“That’s true,” I commented.

“It looks like you’re leaving earlier than I expected. Is it because of Miss Ha-Yan?” she asked.

“Not really. Well, she’s part of the reason, but I also have a bad feeling about all this,” I told her.

“Didn’t you say that we had some time left?” she asked.

“That’s what I think for now,” I said.

“I guess it would be better to be prepared as soon as possible. Anyway, it looks like I’ll be lonely. The Black Swan Guild has a ton of members, so I can’t really tell whether we lost a few members or not. However, the Blue Guild actually looks desolate without your original party members,” she said.

“Well, they’re just kind of far away. I can also contact them anytime,” I said.

“There’s a difference between talking to them personally and talking to them through letters or videos, you know? Anyway, it looks like I took up a lot of your time. You should get going,” Lee Ji-Hye suggested.

“…”

“…”

“This is a gift. I’m sure you’ll be using thermal magic quite often there because the north is pretty cold. Anyway, I’ll see you later, partner,” she said.

“Thanks, partner.”

‘It feels strange.’

However, I couldn’t quite describe my feelings.

‘It feels really strange.’

It seemed that I had really grown fond of them.

And just like that, a year passed…

'I wonder if Ha-Yan is doing okay.'

CHAPTER 563
THE CONTINENT AFTER ONE YEAR (1)

[Construction of the Northern Outpost is Going Smoothly. Kim Mi-Young of the Blue Guild Said—We'll do our best to speed it up —Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

[Is Father Lee Ki-Young Really Ignoring the Continent? The Inauguration for the Continental Protection Management Committee Has Been Prepared, But the Position Still Remains Empty - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

[Confusion Continues in the North and Crime Rates Have Soared. Is Religion the Answer? Father Lee Ki-Young's Small Miracle. "Goddess Benigoa is always watching over us." - Vatican News]

[The Blue Guild Scattered. People Are Curious If They'll Disband. If the Blue Guild Disbands, Where Will the Guild Members Head Next? Archmage Jung Ha-Yan Will Go to the Magic Tower, Shield of Faith Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo Will Go to the Red Mercenary Guild… Other Guild Members Have Already Received Offers From Various Guilds - Guild Column]

[Everyone Cheered When the Blue Guild Revealed the Small Goddess' Mirror. A Smartphone in This World? The Official Name is Goddess' Hand Mirror. Scheduled To Be Released All Over the Continent Soon. Father Lee Ki-Young. "I thought it would be better to have an easier way to contact people…" - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

[The Guild Master of the Blue Guild, Kim Hyun-Sung, says—the guild members are going strong, everyone is apart for various reasons—Dismisses Rumors, Will Consider Taking Legal Action If the Rumors Continue - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

[A Large Mana Detected in a Forest Near Lindel. New Hunting Grounds Are Needed in the Event of Monster Extinction. The Magic Tower is Investigating, But the Cause is Still Unknown. Monsters Ripped to Pieces and Left For Dead Is Abnormal… - Guild

Column]

[Father Lee Ki-Young Withdraws From the Blue Guild. The Conflict Between Kim Hyun-Sung and Lee Ki-Young Rekindled. Witnesses Revealed They Argued While Raising Their Voices in Heren… - Reporter Kang Yumi]

["I have a good relationship with Mr. Hyun-Sung." Why Was Father Lee Ki-Young Forced to Leave the Blue Guild? - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

[The Empty Position Has Finally Been Filled. Father Lee Ki-Young Chose to be the Chairman of the Continental Protection Management Committee. "I'll be as humble and grounded as possible." Chairman Lee Ki-Young Relented Unable to Reject the Will of the Denizens, But What is His Real Intention? - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Democratic Country Daily Report]

* * *

"…"

"I have no idea when it became like this, and I'm not sure when we'll finish all this. Man… if only the weather here weren't so extreme," Mr. Choi said.

"*Hahaha*, it can't be helped. It'd be better if we could use magic, but there aren't a lot of mages who could process mana stones… so this is the best option. Didn't we make some progress?" Mr. Ahn asked.

"Everything looks the same to me… By the way, what do you think?" Mr. Choi asked.

"What do you…" Mr. Ahn asked.

"I'm talking about the rumors about the Blue Guild. Whether that guild is involved in a rumor or not doesn't really matter to people like us who work odd jobs, but as an adventurer who used to fight with swords, I can't help but be interested. Since we're doing the same task every time, I end up listening to useless news here and there… I mean, it's a good topic to talk about over drinks," Mr Choi replied.

"I'm sure the Blue Guild is fine. Yeah, I'm sure," Mr. Ahn said.

"There was news about the guild master and the sub guild master getting into an

argument…" Mr. Choi mentioned.

"I'm sure it's nothing but a speculative article. Like the press mentioned, the two seemed like they've been keeping in touch," Mr Ahn pointed out.

"They could be doing that to look good in front of the press…" Mr Choi said.

"*Hahaha*." Mr. Ahn laughed.

"Anyway, it's strange. Whether a threat is coming to the continent or not, those bastards in power are fighting each other for their own personal benefit. Honestly, building stuff like this probably won't change anything, but I like it since it gave me a job," Mr Choi said.

"I understand why you're anxious, but I'm sure the chairman has a plan," Mr. Ahn said.

"Mr. Ahn, I told you that I don't trust that man. I've been keeping an eye on him because he's smart, but his face looks… wicked," said Mr. Choi.

'That man is really annoying.'

I[1] could see Mr. Choi and Mr. Ahn talking to each other not too far away from me. I wanted to laugh out loud because their conversation was absurd. The rumor about the Blue Guild's disbandment was old news at this point, but I still felt uncomfortable about it.

'No one else can provide something like this.'

We had thermal magic to make us feel warm around the clock while we were working, so they were obviously being considerate of the workers.

'They'll come to their senses once they go on a hunt and encounter monsters.'

Once they had to live in a harsher environment, they would definitely realize by then just how great their living conditions were back then.

I grabbed a hand mirror from my pocket.

I looked down at it and saw a familiar image along with the time and date.

'It's already been a year.'

I had to give up on the Rare-ranked dungeon exploration, but I didn't regret it. My stats increased a lot more here, and the pay was high as well. I did splurge to purchase the Goddess' Hand Mirror, but I had no regrets about purchasing it.

'I knew this would come out.'

The smartphone was the very first device that I started missing the moment I acclimatized to the continent's harsh environment. I knew it would appear someday, but I didn't expect that it would appear so soon and was already ubiquitous.

Of course, not every denizen was privileged enough to afford the Goddess' Hand Mirror, but I was sure that at least eighty percent of the denizens would carry a Goddess' Hand Mirror around a year later.

I turned on the screen and logged on to Benigoa Net.

I posted something, and it immediately got comments.

[Title: There's a Strange Man At Our Workplace, and He's Really Annoying.]

[He keeps on complaining about our work conditions, and every time the chairman is mentioned, he'll make strange comments with veins bulging on his neck like he's mad at the chairman or something. He was talking about the recent rumors floating about the Blue Guild, and he even insulted the chairman, saying that he has the wicked face of someone capable of abandoning mankind.]

[Dirt Spoon: *Ah, hehe*. Is it something you'll get rewarded for if you report it to the heretic inquisitor?]

[Unidentified ID: He's not wrong. I wouldn't go so far as saying that he'll abandon the nation, but… he does look kind of wicked.]

[Nature Lover: What do you mean he looks wicked? He looks sexy and handsome. And the rumors about the Blue Guild are old news. Are people still talking about that? Aren't there rumors saying that the Goddess' Hand Mirror was created for them to communicate with the guild members every day?]

[Unidentified ID: That's being delusional, not a fact. I'm an executive of the Blue

Guild… and the release of the hand mirror has nothing to do with that. We needed money, so we released it. The Blue Guild is still one of the biggest guilds. Do you really think that a guild like that would make something for a lame reason? It's not like Lee Ki-Young doesn't have anything to do… And don't people in this field already know about the rumor surrounding the Blue Guild?]

[Nature Lover: Bullshit. I'm a staff member of the Blue Guild. Who the hell are you?]

[Unidentified ID: Why would I prove that here? Stop lying. You're a staff member of the Blue Guild, yet you don't know about the rumors? The power struggle between Kim Hyun-Sung and Lee Ki-Young has been bad for a long time. You just couldn't tell from the outside. Lee Ki-Young left the guild after enduring it for so long… Why is Elena back in her kingdom? Why is Jung Ha-Yan in the magic tower? And I don't even know where Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo are… Don't you know that Lee Ki-Young recruited all of them to the guild?]

[Nature Lover: How ridiculous. *Hehehehe*. I don't even know how to answer because it's so absurd.]

[Unidentified ID: Look at you just laughing after hitting you with the facts. You're not part of the Blue Guild, are you?]

[Nature Lover: You must think that I'm some kind of loser like you. I'm working right now, so I'll prove it in an hour. You can look forward to it. ^^]

[Unidentified ID: Look at your running away. I'll bet everything I have on you not proving it.]

[Lindel Villager: Where are you working? I think the monsters here are heading upward. If you're working somewhere in the middle, you have to be careful. The monsters near Lindel have disappeared, and they're also evacuating. I guess the world is doomed.]

[Dirt Spoon: What do we do, then?]

[Lindel Villager: I don't know either, but I almost vomited when I saw a monster carcass that was torn to shreds. Even the magic tower hasn't figured out what is going on… I'm actually starting to pity the monsters because it's affecting their ecosystem. Anyway, be careful since the workplaces in the middle still don't have any walls.]

'Unidentified ID. Who the hell are they?'

I was shocked because I didn't expect the post I made out of boredom to become a hot topic. I hurriedly placed the hand mirror back into my pocket, and just in time, I heard a voice shouting at me.

"Hey, Kim! We're going out to eat. Are you coming? We should drink today as well!"

"Coming," I answered.

"The work must've not been that difficult today," Mr. Ahn said.

"Don't you know how many points I have on my Stamina and Strength? They're higher than yours, so don't worry, Mister," I told him.

"*Ahem*… Anyway, you shouldn't spend too much time on that Goddess' Hand Mirror or whatever," Mr. Ahn advised.

"You're talking like a parent on Earth," I commented.

"You didn't make any strange posts there, right?" Mr. Ahn asked.

I was kind of shocked, but I decided not to tell him.

"I didn't," I replied.

"Don't make strange posts on there, no matter what," he warned.

"It has nothing to do with you, mister," I commented.

"It seems convenient and fun, but the posts and comments posted there are under surveillance. Don't you know that a young man in the next town disappeared after making strange posts there? I'm telling you to be careful before the Continental Protection Management Committee takes you away," he explained.

"Those are just conspiracy theories. Who would believe that? They wouldn't release the hand mirror just to observe everyone. It would be more convincing if you told me that they're trying to secure our taxes. How can they check each and every post that people make there? And if people are being kidnapped for making posts, they might take you as well, Mr. Ahn," I said.

"*Ahem…*"

"Don't you agree, Mr. Ahn?" I asked.

"*Ha… haha.* Yeah, you might be right," he chuckled.

"Where's Mr. Park?" I asked.

"He'll be here soon. I think his group mates are slacking…" he answered.

"*Hm…* Then, let's wait here. If we go in first, he'll feel kind of disappointed. By the way, mister," I said.

"Yes?"

"How did you guys end up here?" I asked.

"I'm kind of embarrassed to talk about it…" he answered.

"Just tell me. We have time to waste, anyway. Didn't you say it happened while traveling?" I questioned.

"Something like that. We were traveling to the northernmost region, but we ran out of funds, so we decided to stay here temporarily," Mr. Ahn replied.

"Based on your Strength and Stamina, you don't seem like an ordinary person… Especially Mr. Park. He's like a monster. Can't you get money to travel if you kill a monster and sell it? *Ah*, there aren't any monsters around here…" I said.

"That's right."

"I guess you don't have anyone to borrow money from," I added.

"That's not true, but… they said they're embarrassed," he said.

"What?"

"They're ashamed to borrow money. Anyway, I'm also curious about the construction progress, so I can afford to be patient. *Ah,* there he is. Let's get going," he suggested.

“What were you two talking about?” Mr. Park asked.

Mr. Park’s voice was as loud as always. I turned around cautiously and saw a large-framed man. I couldn’t really see his face because of his shaggy beard. He had the typical demeanor of a bandit, but he was giving off this amicable air for some reason.

I figured that it had to be because of his easy going personality.

‘Why isn’t he wearing a shirt?’

I blushed upon seeing his bulging muscles. It seemed that he didn’t notice my red face because he started patting me on the back.

“Was today’s work difficult?” he asked.

“I-It was kind of difficult,” I stuttered.

“I told you to take it easy, didn’t I? Anyway, let’s go in, bros,” Mr. Park suggested.

I couldn’t help but think that they were kind of strange.

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1. Mr. Kim’s point of view ☜

CHAPTER 564
THE CONTINENT AFTER ONE YEAR (2)

"*Keugh*! I always look forward to this after a hard day's work. The alcohol tastes great as always," Mr. Park said.

"I get it, so just put some clothes on, man. Are you going to keep walking around topless?" Mr. Ahn questioned.

"*Ah*, looks like I've been walking around without a shirt. You should have told me earlier," Mr. Park complained.

"I told you when we walked in here." Mr. Ahn pointed out.

"Well, it's not important, anyway. Here, have a drink. *Ah*, it's really delicious. I want to stay here for a bit longer because of the drinks here," Mr. Park said.

"I believe this region is famous for this drink. I even want to take a bottle with me," Mr. Ahn said.

"You should buy one when you leave or you can ask the supervisors near here for one. You two are great workers, so I'm sure they'd give you one from their supplies," I[1] suggested.

"What? Is that really okay?" Mr. Ahn asked.

"Of course. Do you know how much work you do in one day? Anyway, let's toast once more and end it. If we stay any longer, it'll affect our work tomorrow," I told them.

I downed my alcohol and prepared to go back to my dorm, even though the others looked as if they still wanted to stay longer…

'They must think they're still in their 20s.'

I was sure their work would be affected tomorrow if they drank too much. It was ridiculous how they took a step forward and put their arm around each other's

shoulders.

It was too boring on the way to the dorm, and I suddenly remembered the person who said that they would come back an hour later, so I took out my Goddess' Hand Mirror and logged on to Benigoa Net.

"No way, Nature Lover… really is a staff of the Blue Guild," I mumbled.

They showed their Blue Guild badge and employee card, and Unidentified ID or whatever's comments were deleted. The lurkers appeared and started calling my post their holy sanctuary.

[Dirt Spoon: Wow, *hehe*. It was true. Receiving your energy.]

[Jerry M Who Can't Heal: Please tell me how you got a job at the Blue Guild. They haven't made any recruitment posts lately…]

[Tresha: Unidentified ID, looks like you just ran after blabbering like that, *hehe*. It's obvious who clicked the dislike button. The function that tells you who clicked it is really useful.]

[Lindel Villager: Is the OP safe? I hope nothing happened to them… I'm getting worried because they haven't posted anything.

[Dirt Spoon: Maybe they just dropped out in the middle of it. *Hehehe*. How could the monsters go up there? The middle region is known for having practically zero monsters. They're probably in a nearby forest, so don't worry about them. By the way, based on Nature Lover's badge, they don't seem like an ordinary guild staff… They're at least a team manager.]

The replies made me smile, but I suddenly heard rumbling noises, prompting me to look up.

'What's that noise?'

It was night, so I couldn't see things properly. I squinted and saw a strange figure

moving in the darkness.

'What is that?'

I was startled to see something I hadn't seen over my tenure here.

"Mr. Choi, what's that? Isn't that a monster?" I asked.

"There aren't any monsters… here. Why would they show up all of a sudden when they have been hiding all this while? I guess you're drunk," Mr. Choi replied.

"I'm not drunk…" I commented.

"Where are you working? I think the monsters here are heading upward. If you're working somewhere in the middle, you have to be careful. The monsters near Lindel have disappeared, and they're also evacuating. I guess the world is doomed."

I suddenly recalled the comment I saw on Benigoa Net today.

However, my thoughts were interrupted by the loud blaring of sirens.

"Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!"

"A monster wave. It's a monster wave!"

"What's… going on? Mr. Choi, we're okay, right?" I asked.

"I-I'm not sure—"

"We're still building the wall, so what if they just charge through? We don't have that many soldiers and mages here. Wait, why would monsters be here?" I asked.

"It seems that those who can fight will fight…"

I could hear people shouting around me.

"Reinforcements are coming! Let's hold out until they get here. Soldiers and those who can fight, grab your weapons and take a position on the wall!"

"Just hold out until reinforcements arrive. Climb the wall! Take positions, everyone!"

'What wall? If anything, it's just a fence… How are we supposed to stop them with this?'

The wall probably wouldn't collapse since it was made with mana stones, but small, agile monsters could easily climb the wall. The upcoming battle was like defending a castle. I didn't really want to fight, but…

'I'll die even if I run away.'

Running away was meaningless. I trained to become an adventurer at one point, so I could probably kill a few Rare-ranked monsters. I made up my mind and ran toward the soldiers handing out weapons.

"Bow please," I requested.

"Okay."

"I was an adventurer, so please give me a dagger as well," I said.

'Where are the other guys?'

Mr. Ahn, Mr. Park, and Mr. Choi probably ran away, and it was difficult to spot them on the crowded wall.

'I don't think Mr. Park and Mr. Ahn ran away.'

They looked like they would at least do their part.

'Mr. Choi said he was an adventurer back in the day… '

However, I thought that he had already run away.

'Reinforcements will be here soon since they were contacted early, we also have mages on our side. We don't have to hold out for a long time.'

It was necessary to stick to the manual during a life-or-death crisis like this.

I quickly got into position to shoot and loaded my bow with an arrow. The monsters were still out of range; I was just aiming my bow, but I was already trembling because this was my first time participating in a large-scale battle. I shot the arrow while thinking how it would have been nice if I practiced regularly, the arrow pierced

a monster's skin with a *fwoosh*.

"Fire! Fire!"

The darkness was vanquished because of the mages' fire spells.

Booooooom!!!

The mages cast one spell after another. It seemed that the mages were having a hard time maintaining the thermal magic of the facility because our breaths were turning into white mist. I also heard people crying out, grumbling that it was cold. Anyway, I kept on sending arrows toward the monsters.

The monsters' movements should have stopped upon taking the brunt of the mages' powerful spells, but the monsters seemed like they had gone mad as they foamed at their mouths and charged despite their injuries.

The mages were killing the monsters at breakneck speeds, but the monsters were getting closer to the wall. Soldiers stepped forward with their shields, and I was relieved to see powerful arches at the vanguard.

Unfortunately, there was no way a small group of people could protect such a huge wall.

A large-framed monster reached the wall while foaming at its mouth.

'I have to run.'

However, my body wouldn't move. I was worried about the terrible pain that I would soon experience before dying, but I didn't feel any pain while I was waiting for my demise with closed eyes.

I soon opened my eyes and saw the back of a man holding the large-framed monster's fangs with both hands.

"*Huh? Huh?*"

Before I could say anything, I saw the large monster falling.

"Mr. Park?" I called out.

I didn't hear an answer, but…

"Attack! Attack! Hurry up and follow me!"

[You have been affected by the Legendary attribute, Morale Shout. Your stats have been greatly increased temporarily.]

'What is this?'

Immense power flowed through me, and I felt like I was under the effects of the strongest buff out there. I couldn't quite comprehend what I was seeing. Mr. Park jumped down the *wall* and massacred the monsters.

Mr. Ahn also jumped down the *wall* to kill the monsters with him. The two used blunt weapons, shields, and Mr. Ahn wielded holy power to annihilate the monsters.

However, Mr. Ahn's holy power was too great for him to be a simple holy knight.

I thought that perhaps he was a high-ranking priest, but the way he fought the monsters with a blunt weapon and shield, like Mr. Park, convinced me that he was a warrior before he became a priest.

However, Mr. Park brought me the greatest surprise

'Who is he?'

I knew that Mr. Park wasn't an ordinary man, but he looked like a superhuman at the moment. The way he positioned himself and the way he deftly deflected the heavier attacks and rammed his shield into the weakest monsters made me stare at him in awe.

I couldn't believe the scene that was unfolding in front of me.

Those two were experts at taking space, which allowed the soldiers to surround the bigger monsters. At this rate, it seemed that he wouldn't need any reinforcements.

'What… the hell is that?'

I wondered if it was even possible for a human being to be so strong. I heard that a handful of strong adventurers could take over the battlefield for a short period of time, but I didn't expect that those stories were true.

I watched the battle absentmindedly and completely forgot that we were in the middle of a battle. No, it wasn't even a battle anymore. It was a one-sided massacre.

I took out the Goddess' Hand Mirror and started live streaming. I titled the video *Northern Outpost Castle Defense Situation,* and the live streaming room quickly became filled with people.

[Lindel Villager has entered.]

[Dirt Spoon has entered.]

[Nature Lover has entered.]

[…has entered.]

[…]

[…]

[Lindel Villager: What did I tell you? I said the monsters were heading there. *Wow*, but I guess you don't have to worry. How are you guys so strong? It looks like the battle is in your favor. I heard that your workplace doesn't have any capable soldiers around because monsters are less likely to appear there. Wait, are you on a castle wall?]

[Super Focused: What is the live streamer doing? Everyone is fighting with their lives… what is he doing just standing around streaming all this?]

[Lindel Villager: Don't worry about the haters, just keep streaming. Anyway, can't you see that they have already turned the tables on the monsters? The live streamer is obviously a part of the rearguard… They probably volunteered as a worker rather than a conscripted soldier, so there's no need for them to fight. If anything, they

should be protected. By the way, those two men are really good at fighting. Just look at them, I think they're as powerful as the Eight Seats.]

[Unidentified ID: I find it really disgusting whenever people see someone that's a bit strong and say that they're on the same level as the Eight Seats. I think some people here think that the Eight Seats is a joke, *hehe.*]

[Dirt Spoon: That guy is back.]

[Lindel Villager: No, no. I meant it. They look just as strong as the Eight Seats. There are Epic-ranked monsters mixed in with the other monsters, but look at how he's swinging that shield. He seems to be blocking all the attacks with his body alone. His Endurance is probably over a hundred. I think his equipment is helping as well.]

[Unidentified ID: Why would someone with a hundred Endurance go to such a place? *Hehehe.*]

[Lindel Villager: Just shut up and stop embarrassing yourself. Whoever they are, it's best to think that they're at least Legendary-ranked. I think they're Korean… I've never heard of a holy knight and warrior like them… I know almost all of the high-ranking adventurers in the world, but I've never seen them before. Who are they?]

[Unidentified ID: Looks like the Korean specialist is here. I swear Korean specialists are built different. Whenever they see someone who's a bit stronger than average, they'll say that those people are Korean. They're also delusional, thinking about knowing almost all of the high-ranking adventurers in this world. If you're that knowledgeable, then I'm Lee Ki-Young's friend. *Hehehe.*]

[Dirt Spoon: Stop giving him any attention.]

[Lindel Villager: I had always been ignoring him. Anyway, does anyone here know them?]

[Nature Lover: Park Deok-Gu, Ahn Ki-Mo.]

[Lindel Villager: What?]

[Nature Lover: Found ya.]

[Nature Lover has left the room.]

“What…?”

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1. Mr. Kim's point of view ☜

CHAPTER 565
THE CONTINENT AFTER ONE YEAR (3)

"Did you really find them?" I[1] asked.

- Yes. It has been confirmed that Mr. Park Deok-Gu and Mr. Ahn Ki-Mo are at the 53rd Construction Site fighting a monster wave. We still have to figure out the details, but a worker live-streamed the castle defense on Benigoa Net. If you'd like, I can send over the video right away.

"Please send it over to me right now. By the way, why are they there?" I asked.

- The reason hasn't been confirmed yet. I'll find out the reason as soon as possible and let you know.

"Who's in charge of the construction there?" I asked.

- The Union of Kingdoms. The person in charge is… Michael Wayne of the Western City Guild. The details—

"*Ahh*, I remember it now. Please send a message to the person in charge of the site right away. Tell him that I'm looking for him—Actually, give him a Goddess' Hand Mirror. We don't know where he's going to run, so I think it's best if I contact him myself," I instructed.

- Understood.

"And please make sure to reward the person who found those two. Who found them?" I asked.

- Well… it was an anonymous report.

"*Hm,* it can't be helped. I've been looking for them, but it looks like they went all the way there," I commented.

"Yes, sub—I mean, Chairman.

“You can call me Sub Guild Master, Miss Kim Mi-Young. More importantly… how are things over there?” I asked.

- Nothing out of the ordinary has been happening since Miss Sun Hee-Young and Miss Hwang Jung-Yeon are leading the guild pretty well, even though they’re not quite used to it. *Ah!* Miss Lee Sang-Hee has been helping them as well. I believe she’s thinking about joining the frontline.

“*Ah*, Miss Lee Sang-Hee… That’s kind of unexpected,” I said.

- She said she wouldn’t ask for shares or ownership of the Blue Guild. She seemed worried that you two would misunderstand her. She knows that the guild master and you both own the operation rights of the guild, and she has repeated it many times before. I also acknowledge…

“…”

- If that makes you uncomfortable, I’ll take care of it on the side.

“No, there’s no need to do that. We need all the help we can get, so there is no need to be wary of her, and she’s not the greedy type as well. She operated the guild for a long time, so I’m sure she’ll be very useful. And another thing I wanted to ask—*Ah*, have you received any news from Mr. Hyun-Sung?” I asked.

- I think he’s still there, but he still hasn’t contacted us. His growth is probably slower than what he expected… Miss Jo Hye-Jin told us that they’d spend a bit more time there before leaving. Miss Elena and Miss Yoo Ah-Young are also planning on returning from the kingdom…

“It’s been a while,” I commented.

- And Miss Dialugia requested that we start coming to the lair because Miss Dialuria is about to wake up…

“She could’ve contacted me herself…” I mumbled.

- She said she’s having a hard time using the machine…

“…”

- Anyway, I'll take care of all the things we discussed along with the things you mentioned earlier.

"Thank you, Miss Kim Mi-Young. And please send me the room details rather than just the video. I think it's best if I watch it myself," I said.

- I'll connect you right away.

"Thank you."

"…"

'Why is that pig there?'

I tapped on my armrest while waiting for Kim Mi-Young to give me the room details.

I looked around and saw a familiar face in the mirror sitting on one corner of the desk.

It was a face that wasn't too different from a year ago, aside from the fact that I was wearing the Committee's badge rather than the Blue Guild's Bage.

I actually thought I lost some weight because I skipped a lot of meals over the year. Still, I thought I looked better back then when I was a bit chubbier.

The bags under my eyes caught my attention. It had only been a year since then, so it wasn't that long for me to go through any drastic transformation. However, the changes that happened in the world over the year made it seem like a year was a long time.

The Goddess' Hand Mirror was like the smartphone of this world, and it quickly became ubiquitous upon its release. The adventurers of Earth quickly adapted to the new technology as if they had been waiting for its release.

I was sure that the denizens were a bit confused, but they adapted faster than I thought. I could still remember how people treated the Goddess' Hand Mirror reverently and how they used respectful and polite words over the Benigoa Net.

However, it didn't take that long for them to change, and now, it wasn't that difficult to find someone using slang words and profanity.

[Precious Child of Castle Rock: Hey, Unidentified ID. Please mind your words. The Benigoa Net is a holy sanctuary.]

That was what they said, but now, a year later…

[Precious Child of Castle Rock: You think you're all high and mighty by using profanity? Have you asked your mother about our date last night?]

Anyway, the denizens adapted perfectly to the anonymity of the Benigoa Net to the point that it wasn't a big deal to start cursing someone else's mother.

I thought about forcefully transforming Benigoa Net into a wholesome community, but Benigoa Net guaranteed anonymity. I also wanted people to speak whatever was on their minds, so I welcomed their attitudes.

It was a bit difficult to organize the enormous amount of data that came with the Benigoa Net, but I could easily filter out and look for whatever information I wanted.

The Goddess' Hand Mirror and the Benigoa Net wasn't the only monumental change.

The Continental Protection Management Committee also became well-established over the year, and the construction of the northern outpost was going smoothly.

The castle walls and the tower were near completion, and the work speed of the other regions wasn't that bad as well.

The farther they were, the slower their progress, but they were already working faster than usual, so I couldn't really complain.

I was glad that I had made the decision to focus solely on the Committee rather than divide my attention to both the Blue Guild and the committee. The world changed so much, so I naturally became curious…

'I'm curious about how much they've changed… '

I hadn't been able to contact Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo, unlike the others. It seemed that they ignored the Goddess' Hand Mirror and even went around in disguises, so I hadn't heard any rumors about them.

I wasn't sure whether they had gone into a dungeon and got stuck there for a long time or if they got into big trouble and decided to hide to avoid implicating me.

I thought it would be fine since they were together, but I started getting worried after five months, but nine months quickly passed. Who could have known that the guys I had been trying to find all this while were playing at one of the outposts' construction sites?

'Why are they working there?'

I couldn't understand it.

I knew they were weirdos, but they seemed even weirder to me now.

'I'm sure they're not working there to earn money. I don't think they ended up spending all their money while traveling north. I don't see any dangerous monsters nearby, and I'm sure they're not working there for money because they're ashamed about contacting me to ask for some money.'

Park Deok-Gu wasn't *that* dumb. I wasn't sure what they were thinking, but they probably stayed there for the experience. I couldn't quite grasp their train of thought, so they probably decided to work there for such a silly reason.

I soon entered the live-streaming room.

[Unidentified ID: How could they be Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo? *Hehehe.*]

[Dirt Spoon: I don't think they're Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo… Why would they be there?]

[Unidentified ID: I'm sure Nature Lover left after throwing that bait because they were lying. Verification, my ass! It looks like they deleted their verification post as

well, *hehehe*. Looks like Nature Lover is hiding something, *hehehe*.]

[Lindel Villager: No, no, the badge was real. Looks like they're dealing with sensitive internal issues. They're definitely Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo. I can see it. I've seen them from afar before, and they looked exactly like that.]

[Unidentified ID: Another delusional one. *Hehehe*.]

[Lindel Villager: What's your problem?]

'Looks like they're getting along.'

It seemed that Benigoa Net was lively today as well, which made me happy. It seemed that someone had thrown a bait, and the people in the chat were arguing about the true identity of the two people in the livestream.

The people in the chat were quite serious in their deductions. There were even people who provided proof that those two guys couldn't be Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo, while there were some who entered the room just to create chaos.

To make matters worse, there were even people insulting the streamer. Of course, the streamer also had defenders, so a massive argument erupted and was still ongoing.

It had been a while since I logged on to Benigoa Net. Anyway, the debate and the result of the debate didn't really matter to me because I came here to see for myself if those two men were indeed Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo.

However, it didn't even take me one second to become sure of it.

'It's them.'

Their figures were blurry, but those two were definitely Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo. I was sure that people who were seeing them for the first time and those who hadn't seen them for a long time would have trouble recognizing them.

However, I had spent such a long time with them that I easily deduced their identities by examining the smaller and even the smallest details. Anyway, one was

big while the other was tall, so they were obviously Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo.

'Did Park Deok-Gu eat a growth accelerator or something? I think he grew taller.'

He grew taller and wider. He even had a beard. Ahn Ki-Mo didn't look that different, but he seemed really experienced with close-quarters combat. He wasn't that bad before, but he had become more stylish in combat than before.

'I'd believe it if I were told that he was a top-tier warrior. Park Deok-Gu also became really strong.'

I would have to check their stats, but it seemed like they had finally filled up the stats that they were lacking. Park Deok-Gu used his Endurance effectively and was moving efficiently. They weren't really putting in that much effort, so I reckoned that they would be a huge threat if they really tried.

'They might be just as strong as the Eight Seats.'

The Democratic Country's Eight Seats weren't weak, but they only seemed that way because of the monsters like Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, and Cha Hee-Ra. If they grouped up, they could easily dispose of Semi-Mythic monsters.

Ahn Ki-Mo and Park Deok-Gu had grown so much stronger that I couldn't help but applaud their progress.

'When did Park Deok-Gu become so strong?'

I couldn't tell Ahn Ki-Mo's physical growth in the video, but it was clear that he had become more clever. It seemed that his tactics had developed. He had advanced magic operation knowledge, so he was great at manipulating the mana throughout him.

His movements had become advanced as well. He was no longer making any wasteful movements, and his actions had become more concise.

He had also become knowledgeable about when to use a certain level of strength and when to block rather than dodge.

I couldn't help but question if it was even possible for someone to change so much in just a year.

[Lindel Villager: I think he's really Park Deok-Gu, but I don't remember him being that strong… damn, he's really good. Ahn Ki-Mo was already popular when he was still in the Red Mercenary Guild, so I knew he was strong, but—wow, Park Deok-Gu's growth is surprising.]

[Unidentified ID: The Blue Guild is filled with talents. Kim Hyun-Sung recruited only talented people, after all… It's also extremely difficult to become a part of the Blue Guild. Their standards are stringent, so it's not strange that the Blue Guild is filled with powerful people. If that man there is Park Deok-Gu, then I'm sure he has been slacking because he's still not good enough compared to the other members of the guild.]

[Lindel Villager: What are you talking about? Everyone knows that Park Deok-Gu is obsessed with training. He wakes up at dawn to train, so how can you say that he's not trying? Just stay quiet if you don't know what you're talking about. Mr. Kim, are you not going to block this guy?]

Park Deok-Gu was steadily annihilating the monsters, and the chat room got livelier as time went on. Even I thought that Park Deok-Gu looked charming and cool, so it wasn't strange that these strangers were hyped up.

I saw some rude comments, and some even said that they were waiting for Park Deok-Gu to get injured. Unfortunately for them, the soldiers of the 53rd construction site successfully repelled the monsters.

I had an idea how the monsters reached the 53rd construction site, but I decided not to think about it in the meantime.

The soldiers expressed their gratitude to Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo

Bzzz!

My hand mirror suddenly vibrated in my hand.

"*Ah*."

It was Jung Ha-Yan.

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1. Lee Ki-Young's point of view ☜

CHAPTER 566
THE CONTINENT AFTER ONE YEAR (4)

'Should I answer her?'

I thought about not answering her because I knew that we would be on the phone for hours if I were to answer here. Soon, the Goddess' Hand Mirror became quiet once more.

However, I knew from experience that it would start vibrating once more. As expected, I received multiple messages at once to the point that it was actually a bit scary how fast she was sending them out.

[Jung Ha-Yan: You're not picking up. Did something happen?]

[Jung Ha-Yan: Looks like I called when you're really busy. I don't think you're seeing my messages…]

[Jung Ha-Yan: Nothing happened, right? It's been a while since I heard your voice.]

[Jung Ha-Yan: You're not with another woman right now, right?]

[Jung Ha-Yan: I didn't mean to send that text earlier. Don't misunderstand.]

[Jung Ha-Yan: Why aren't you picking up?]

[Jung Ha-Yan: I miss you. I really miss you.]

[Jung Ha-Yan: Please call me.]

[Jung Ha-Yan: You're done now, right? I can visit you, right? Can I come right now?]

[Jung Ha-Yan: It's okay. I'll just wait here.]

[Jung Ha-Yan: I've been really stressed recently. Can we talk on the phone for a little bit?]

[Jung Ha-Yan: What are you doing right now? Looks like you're working.]

[Jung Ha-Yan: Hello?]

[Jung Ha-Yan: I miss you… I miss you so much.]

Tens of messages came in a stream. I had no choice but to answer because it seemed like her *disease* was coming back. To make things worse, even Han Sora messaged me and she seemed more desperate than Jung Ha-Yan. It seemed that they were together.

[Han Sora: Please answer her call. I beg you, sub guild master. Please… please pick up Miss Ha-Yan's call. Please, please. Or at least answer her messages. You're reading this, right?]

[Han Sora: Please answer just once. I'm really scared.]

'I'm sure she's really suffering right now.'

I couldn't really do anything for her right now aside from giving her a big reward. In fact, the allowance I had been giving Han Sora over the past year as compensation for her struggles to stay with Jung Ha-Yan was an exorbitant amount.

If it hadn't been for her, I was sure that Jung Ha-Yan would have already caused several issues by now. There were times when she got close to her breaking point, but Han Sora calmed her down.

"It seemed like yesterday when Han Sora called me in the middle of the night and cried while begging me to come to visit them…" I mumbled.

"Please come. Please, p-please. I need you to come right now. Kgh, please… You have to

come. I'll be in big trouble if you don't. Please hurry. Just this once. Plese, please, please, Sub Guild Master. Save me… just this once. Save me. Just this once… Heuk… save me. Please, please save me… Please… you shitty bastaaaaard…"

I was startled when I answered her call, and the situation was definitely dire because Han Sora's face was covered in tears and snot.

Han Sora's role was extremely important. She was actively saving Senator Nabot's Mirror Lake, Lindel, and the entire continent. If she had been a bit late when she called me at the time, the second coming of the 27th Legion could have happened.

The bottom line was that my plan of not seeing her for a whole year failed, but the entire plan could be considered a success because Jung Ha-Yan was growing once again.

She wasn't growing by leaps and bounds like before, but it was meaningful growth.

'It's not strange that she's growing.'

I only met Jung Ha-Yan twice during the entire year. I thought it was amazing that she managed to endure not seeing me for a month, but she endured it for half a year. I personally didn't want to see her at all or contact her, but if I were to continue ignoring her and playing hard to get, something bad would happen.

I had to know her exact condition, so I had been asking her to send me videos, which played a big role in the plan. I tapped on one of the videos and saw Jung Ha-Yan from a year ago. She looked happy in the video.

- Oppa, how are you doing? I'm doing fine. I'm sorry for contacting you all of a sudden. I studied really hard today, and I read a lot of books in the tower. I also created many new spells. It's kind of hard, but I can do it. I must. I-I-It can't be helped, so don't worry too much. I'm doing my best as well…

-…

- The elder mages in the magic tower were s-s-suprised. They said it's their first time seeing my spells. You're doing well, right? I-I really miss you. Really. I'll stop now since y-you're probably busy.

I thought she was holding out pretty well up until this point.

- You're doing fine, right? I-I'm sorry for contacting you so suddenly like this again. I really want to show you something. Do you remember what I told you four days ago? I'll show you right now. I'm still demonstrating it to others, and many… guilds all said that they wanted to s-see it as well, so many people gathered in the tower. I'm honestly not sure, but… t-the elders said that I grew a lot. They complimented me and said that I had grown a lot since last week. I'm not lying. T-They really said that. R-Right?

- Yes, Miss Jung Ha-Yan is right. *Hahaha*. Honestly, compared to the spells she had created before, what she's about to show you is a bit lacking, but it's definitely groundbreaking.

- D-Don't say that! D-Don't… say that!

- *Ah*… I-I'm sorry…

- Anyway, I'll show it to you right now. Y-You'll be surprised.

-…

-…

-…

- Did you see that? I-I really want to know what you think. P-Please let me know through a video and not a letter. Please. I really miss you. I-I think it's because I suddenly couldn't see you when I've been seeing you every day. I'm sorry for bothering you. I'll call you again.

It was fine up until this point, but the grandpas at the magic tower seemed surprised at her strange attitude.

The issue started after this video was sent.

She struck a plateau, but she still had to send me dozens of videos to show me her growth, which had to have been exhausting for her.

She was smiling brightly in another video, but there was a mess behind her. I couldn't quite describe it. The room looked like it had been ravaged by a typhoon.

Books were torn to pieces and walls were filled with scratches. The highlight of the video was Han Sora, who was looking at the screen nervously while sitting in the corner.

Her terrified face stood out more than Jung Ha-Yan's messy hair because she was like a rat in front of a cat.

- I-I-I'm sending… I'm sending a video… t-t-today as well. Oppa, I really miss you. I really do. I really, really, really miss you! Really… *Kgh*… I-I'm still doing my best. Since I'm doing my best, I'd like it if we could meet. I-I really… don't like it when I'm away from you… I really don't. I want to stay with you… M-Miss Sora as well. Right?

- Y-Yes, you're right, Miss Jung Ha-Yan… She's right, Sub Guild Master! I-I think you come and visit her here! Miss Jung Ha-Yan has grown a lot. Please… A-And about what I contacted you before… I-If you could do… something about that…

- W-What did you tell him?

- It's about work… a-about work—*Heuk*! It was about work. *Heuuuung…* I'm telling the truth.

- *Click.*

Jung Ha-Yan sent me more videos after that one, and her condition noticeably got worse in every video. Han Sora looked like she couldn't handle it anymore, but I didn't think it was that bad.

There was a lull, and it lasted for quite a while. There wasn't anything substantial in

the video she sent that shattered the lull. It was just…

- Kill…

-……

- You… shouldn't… d-do… that. *Ah*, that's… Yeah. That should work… *Ah*… Ki…

I knew I had to do something after seeing Jung Ha-Yan staring at the screen absentmindedly and mumbling to herself.

I knew she would blow up at least once, but I couldn't allow her to explode right now, so I immediately packed my bags to visit the Magic Tower and spend time with Jung Ha-Yan. The journey took me three days. She bawled her eyes out and stuck to me like glue, saying that she wouldn't let me go.

The next time I saw her was four months later, and it was about two months after I received Han Sora's frantic call.

'It's getting shorter… Should I tell her to come here?'

She was reaching her limits faster than before, but I was happy because her desire to see me resulted in her massive growth. However, I was still worried. I initially thought about making her explode at the right time by delicately timing my visits.

Unfortunately, Han Sora told me that every day for her was like walking on thin ice. I knew she wasn't lying based on the hundreds of text messages I had been receiving every day. Han Sora's frantic calls every day were bothering me as well.

The silver lining here was her growth, but…

'It's frustrating… '

Han Sora was nervous about what kind of trouble Jung Ha-Yan would make every day.

Actually, Jung Ha-Yan had already incited a monster wave. It wasn't intentional, of course, but I didn't think it was okay to leave Jung Ha-Yan to her devices anymore.

I had just discovered Park Deok-Gu's whereabouts, so I thought that it would be best for me to call her here. In fact, some of the members who were participating in the joint training were already starting to settle down here.

'I think that's the best decision I could make here.'

I called her, and Jung Ha-Yan's face appeared on the screen not even a second later.

- O-Oppa. Oppa! Is something wrong?

'What are you talking about? You called me.'

- Y-You saw my text. D-Did I send too many? I-I feel like I interrupted you while you're working…

'You did interrupt my work. How could you not?'

"It's fine. I was actually resting. How are your studies going?" I asked.

- It's going well. I-I was actually practicing not that long ago. With Miss Sora.

'You were texting me not that long ago.'

"Looks like I called at a bad time. I suddenly feel bad…" I said.

- N-No, that's not true. I was actually going to take a break. Yes… I-I-I was going to…

'Ha-Yan… really hasn't changed.'

It wasn't just her behavior that hadn't changed. Her appearance hadn't really changed as well, aside from her hair which had grown a bit longer.

Anyway, she looked normal, which was a stark difference compared to the videos that she had been sending to me, where her hair was messy with bloodshot eyes.

I thought that it would be fine for me to let her stay there a bit longer…

- Miss Sora is resting with me. H-H-Here.

I immediately changed my mind after seeing Han Sora's condition. I could easily tell that she frantically tidied herself up at the last second. Her face was pale, and she was quivering while staring at the screen with her horror-filled eye.

She looked like she was locked up with a serial killer or a murderous ghost. It was clear that something serious had been happening until I decided to call Jung Ha-Yan.

- He… Hell… Hello. Miss Jung Ha-Yan is right, we've been studying Sub Guild Master. w-w-when… can we see you?

She was doing her best to prevent the same incident from happening again.

Her remaining eye quivered violently, obviously asking me for help.

- R-R-R-Right?

Jung Ha-Yan's eyes looked scary to me now after I saw Han Sora's condition.

"After one month, I think it's best if you move here with me…"

- What?

"My work is starting to get lighter. But if you want to stay there, you can —" I told her.

- No, no. I-It's not like that. I'll go! I-I-I'll go there as soon as possible…

"Okay, but until then, I want you to focus really hard on your studies. If I don't see any changes, I'll feel like I disrupted your studies. You understand what I'm saying, right?" I asked.

'Let's do our best… until the end.'

- Y-Yes, I understand. *Kgh…* I understand. *Hiccup, kgh,* I'm saved. *Hiccup*, it's finally over. *Heuuuung… Hiccup*, finally… *kgh*, I'm saved. I-I'll do my best and head there. I'll run there. *Kgh*. I love you. I love you!

It was clear that Jung Ha-Yan had been sad all this while because she started crying

upon hearing my plans. Someone else was crying as well but for a different reason.

- Oh, Goddess…! *Heuk*, thank you. Thank you, Goddess!

Han Sora cried.

'I'll give you a lot of money, Sora. Seriously, a lot!'

I felt kind of guilty.

CHAPTER 567
THE CONTINENT AFTER ONE YEAR (5)

I felt guilty, but it wasn't like I could do anything. Han Sora and Jung Ha-Yan had gotten closer than I initially expected, and I knew that she had been really helpful in controlling Jung Ha-Yan's temper.

She could calm Jung Ha-Yan, and she was like a preventive measure that prevented Jung Ha-Yan from reaching her boiling point. I couldn't help but be reminded of my old self upon thinking that Han Sora was doing all that for herself, not for the continent.

I was really impressed by how she could convince Jung Ha-Yan to calm down and turn her attention elsewhere. In other words, she was a valuable individual capable of comforting a friend in distress.

Besides Park Deok-Gu, Kim Hyun-Sung, and me, Jung Ha-Yan didn't open up, but they became close enough for her to open up to her, so it's safe to assume that Han Sora's safety won't be threatened. Obviously, unexpected accidents can happen, but…

'Her life won't be in danger, and she's getting paid.'

She had a base salary as stipulated in her contract, but if the bonuses I had been giving her were included, then she had the highest salary in the Blue Guild.

I started nitpicking things, and my guilt slowly vanished. I was sure Han Sora had the energy to hold out since she just had to endure it for another month, but of course, Jung Ha-Yan's progress was more important than Han Sora's condition.

'I wonder if she'll grow a lot until we meet next month.'

I got nervous about the possibility that what had happened in the past would happen once more, but I was sure that she would give her all. I wasn't sure just how strong she would become, but based on what I had seen so far.

'She might level up… '

I was talking about Jung Ha-Yan here, so it was a bit unfortunate. A level wasn't that impactful for Jung Ha-Yan, but it was a chasm that most mages would encounter and might never overcome for the rest of their lives.

I wanted Jung Ha-Yan to grow as fast as possible, but it was better if she took things one step at a time.

Anyway, I decided to stop thinking about Jung Ha-Yan. A month later, she would come running here, so I could just enjoy my time with Park Deok-Gu until then.

'I wonder how everyone is doing.'

I talked to Elena and Yoo Ah-Young, and I even talked to Lee Chang-Ryeol, even though we weren't really close. Sun Hee-Young, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Kim Mi-Young—I would often see these three because we were working together. As for the other members of the Blue Guild, I would meet them periodically for meetings.

I also had frequent meetings with Jo Hye-Jin, who was in charge of the joint training in Kim Hyun-Sung's place.

Unfortunately, I lost contact with Park Deok-Gu, Kim Hyun-Sung, and Cha Hee-Ra. The last time I spoke to Kim Hyun-Sung was nine months ago. It was when he started focusing on his own training.

'He's pretty extreme.'

Was it really necessary for him to cut all contact off and go into seclusion? I was surprised when he told me that it would be extremely difficult to contact him.

My surprise doubled because he told me his plans right after I became the Chairman of the Committee.

I would sometimes receive news from Jo Hye-Jin about his status, but I didn't expect that he would devote himself to swinging his swords for nine whole months.

I had told him to lay down the burdens he had been carrying, and he actually looked like he had done that, but now, it seemed like he was carrying a brand-new burden.

I was relieved that he didn't seem to be struggling with this *new* burden, but I was still worried about him because he didn't really have the strongest mental state out

there. If his growth stopped or things went awry, he would easily get burnout.

I stood up while organizing my thoughts before making a call.

Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo were at the 53rd Construction Zone.

"*Ah*, this is Chairman Lee. So—"

- *Oh,* it's an honor. I'm Michael Wayne of the 53rd Construction Zone. I never imagined that you'd contact me yourself… I-It's an honor.

"It's nothing. I believe we met when the plans were announced. I thought about contacting you at one point, but… I've been really busy so far. Unfortunately, I have had no time to visit the site. How are things over there?" I asked.

- The sudden monster wave was really surprising, but we safely drove out the monsters thanks to Mr. Park Deok-Gu and Mr. Ahn Ki-Mo. The castle walls are fine, and there are only a few casualties. The construction will be slightly delayed, but we'll do our best… to catch up as soon as possible…

"I'm glad that you're safe. By the way, I heard you received a call from Miss Kim Mi-Young. Are they with you right now?" I asked.

- Yes, b-but…

"…"

- They left immediately after getting paid. I did as Miss Kim Mi-Young had instructed and gave them Goddess' Hand Mirrors. We were even willing to send them off, but… they refused…

"*Ah*…"

- I'm sorry. I-I didn't know what to do… I'm really sorry.

"*Ha…*"

- I'm sorry. It was so sudden, so I… I couldn't stop them…

"No, *whoo*, it's fine. I understand, Mr. Wayne. Don't worry too much about it. Just

focus on cleaning everything up," I ordered.

- Yes, sir.

"Did they mention which way they were going?" I asked.

- They said they were heading to the northernmost region. They're probably heading toward where you are, sir…

"*Hm*, that makes sense. Anyway, thank you for your hard work. I'll make sure to send reinforcements there. That's all," I said.

- Thank you… thank you very much, sir. It's an honor.

"Thank you."

Click.

"*Ah*, I knew it. That pig…" I mumbled.

They were probably heading to the northernmost region.

I was worried that they would go off track while they were on their way here.

They left right away, so I figured that they had a plan. They were nosy, so I was sure that they would accept useless quests while they were on their way here, like taking care of a bear terrorizing the citizens or chopping wood for the village.

"Why is it so hard to contact them?"

'I need to take care of my tasks, too.'

I muttered in disappointment while walking out. I wasn't walking out for any particular reason. I just couldn't focus on my work here, so I decided to leave.

'Ah, my coat.'

I stepped outside while wearing a thick coat that protected me from the cold.

The staffers of the committee greeted me.

Park Lian and my bodyguards immediately followed me.

The first thing I saw when I went outside was a large castle wall. The castle wall was riddled with technicians who were hard at work. The wall was so tall that I couldn't see anything beyond it, and the towers on the wall were even higher than the wall.

It wasn't done yet, but the castle wall built with magic stones looked firm. I couldn't help but applaud their rapid progress, but I expected them to be this fast.

'This is the first line of defense. If Park Deok-Gu wanted to help us, he should have already come here.'

The workers were still busy working on the wall. Honestly, I didn't expect that they would be so quick. The progress rate of the other regions was slow, but it couldn't be helped because this place was being prioritized.

It had to be known that the benefits and pay were the reasons work was going so smoothly.

The pay was decent, and we provided insurance as well. Thermal magic was also being maintained around the clock to fend off the cold, but most importantly, we were respecting every worker here.

With those factors in mind, it would be strange if work were slow.

I was convinced that they would work even faster if we were to exploit them and force them to work more hours by whipping them if they were to refuse, but they were performing better than I thought using this kind of method.

'I wonder if six months is enough time for them to finish.'

The foundation was already built.

'It's so smooth that I'm actually getting worried.'

I couldn't find anything that could cause issues, but things were going so well that it was making me nervous.

"Why do you look so worried?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“I don’t know. Anyway, there isn’t anything special going on today, right? Is everything ready?” I asked.

“If you’re talking about the people from the joint training, we’re almost ready. We provided them with a place to stay and amenities. I also believe that the soldiers left without any issues. They should arrive here soon,” she replied.

“*Hm…*”

“This place will look even more like a city once they arrive…” she muttered.

“There are many workers and technicians here, and we invested a lot of manpower to manage them all. I mean, this place *is* already a city. If we combine the regions nearby, it’s probably as big as a kingdom. We have already created a market, and I think we should actually start to get worried about security,” I explained.

“Everyone is doing fine so far, but I think it’ll get kind of chaotic. There are things I’m worried about, but…” she paused.

“What are you worried about?” I asked.

“Many things. The labor strikes and stuff,” she answered.

“I knew that something like that would happen, but nothing serious has actually happened,” I said.

“No, no. I feel like they backed down too fast. You know that some of the technicians are receiving better treatment than the adventurers, right? In that case, why are they still talking about strikes?

”I think there’s something wrong with their heads because they’re already talking about creating a workers union or whatnot. Since this large construction site has a future, they probably want to create a labor aristocracy or something… The sixth zone’s work speed is slower than the other regions, and it’s bringing the other regions down,” she explained.

“Who’s managing that region? The people who are talking about strikes or whatever, have you checked their chat logs on Benigoa Net?” I asked.

“I didn’t find anything. I initially thought they had a mastermind, but I don’t think

that's the case. Of course, we can't completely rule that possibility out. I haven't seen someone openly showing their hostility toward the committee, but standing at the top means you'll have a bird's-eye view of what's underneath," she said.

"*Hm…*"

"The current situation is probably drastically different from the reports and documents you have been receiving, oppa," she added.

"I understand what you're trying to say," I told her.

"I'm sure the managers of every construction zone are desperately trying to cover up any worker issues or strikes. I'm sure they don't want to look bad in front of Chairman Lee Ki-Young, so they're trying to hide the issues underneath a veneer of placidity.

"I think you'll understand better if you think about the high-ranking military officers in Korea. Those people would always handle any issues within the base in the base. In other words, what happens in a construction zone stays in a construction," she said.

I had to agree with Lee Ji-Hye.

The Manager of the 53rd Construction Zone—Michael Wayne—had told me that there weren't any issues within the construction site, but it would be best for me to assume that he was lying because they literally just had to deal with a monster wave.

How could they be fine after that?

Of course, Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo weren't there, so they definitely didn't suffer many casualties. However, I was sure that he said those words to me because he was afraid of staining his career with even the smallest flaw.

'There was a reason why kings in the old days eventually became dumb kings.'

Lee Ji-Hye had opened both my eyes and ears.

'Labor strikes… '

CHAPTER 568
THE CONTINENT AFTER ONE YEAR (6)

As far as I knew, the first worker strike happened in Egypt, and it was more like a rebellion against the Pharaoh. They weren't getting paid properly, so the technicians and the workers who had built the pyramids decided to stand up against the government.

I was sure the nobles at the time were surprised, but it wasn't that surprising at all. It was inevitable because basic human rights weren't being enforced. Anyway, just a few decades ago—no, a few years ago, I had heard of riots back on Earth. Law enforcement officers had to use tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowd.

The Pharaoh definitely had it worse, and the Pharaoh's furious fist landed squarely on the heads of the rioting workers.

However, the workers won for some reason.

The Pharaoh's goal of completing the pyramids before his death became the reason for his death.

I was sure there were other complex reasons behind the scenes, but the managers and the higher-ups had definitely prioritized only the speed of the construction without taking care of the workers.

The workers had been shouting that they would excavate the Pharaoh's grave if their payments were to be withheld. One would think that the workers would get punished rather than paid, considering the time period. However, they actually got paid and received no punishment.

'They were pretty amazing.'

I wasn't sure whether the workers in Egypt back then were considered that important to their society or if they simply had a shortage of workers. Anyway, the workers definitely celebrated their victory.

'It's a bit too much to use that example in this situation… '

I thought it was similar to my current situation because my mission was to build the outpost as fast as possible, no matter what. It had to be done by any means. If I were a despicable manager, I would force the workers to finish their work without paying them.

'But I'm not a despicable manager, so what's up with those bastards?'

There was no end to human greed, and we often repeat our mistakes.

However, I was sure that the workers were higher than average pay, and they were being treated properly as well. They even had paid time off, and we would pay them overtime if they decided to work beyond working hours.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that they were working a job that most people could only dream of doing. In other words, they should have been satisfied.

We were even paying priests to stand by around the clock for the sake of treating injured workers. We were using a ton of money to pay so many people for the sake of the outpost, and if it hadn't been for the Goddess' Hand Mirrors, we wouldn't have been able to afford everything.

'Are they out of their minds?'

"Was I treating them too well? I'm feeling kind of sad because I feel like I got off to a bad start," I said.

"No, they definitely got efficient. We even provide performance-based pay, so it'd be strange for them not to come to work.

"If we hadn't been providing them with this kind of environment, they wouldn't have been this efficient even if we were to whip them. It actually took us a year to get this far. Think about it. It's only been a year," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"Are you saying that…"

"It has only been a year, so it would have been strange if there weren't any complications. I knew there would be complications when I heard that your plan is a three-year plan, and it finally happened in the form of a worker strike.

“The first issue was that you were too strict on the managers when the construction first began. You even fired a manager as an example to warn the managers, so the managers got scared of reporting any anomalies.

”There are always replacements out there, so it’s no wonder they’re withholding information from you. They’re scared of being replaced,” said Lee Ji-Hye.

“*Hm*…”

“You should have just hired your guild members…” she said.

“I had no choice… My position is high, but it would be an issue if every manager is from the Blue Guild. Yes, everything is under the Committee’s control, but we still have to show everyone that there’s equality within the Committee. That’s why I left the Blue Guild in the first place,” I told her.

“I understand,” she said.

“The only reason why I have a lot of shares in the Sacred Democratic Country and Lindel is because I had invested in them. I still have to show everyone that the continent has united. I need to create the impression that we’re working together toward the same goal.

”It’s not just the Republic, the Federation, the Kingdom of Other, or the Union. I have to split the shares with the alliances as well. I can give positions to people who have been supporting me, but gaps here and there can’t be avoided. Honestly, I acknowledge that I got a bit too hasty,” I explained.

“Well, you looked like you were possessed back then. You were in such a hurry. I told you that I’d do my best, but… the scale is simply too large. Don’t get me started on organizing the Committee. It’s unfortunate, but it can’t be helped. Complications aren’t strange during rapid growth,” she said.

It was a completely different topic, but her last sentence reminded me of Jung Ha-Yan for some reason.

‘That line is making me uneasy, so let’s just stop talking about it.’

I looked at Lee Ji-Hye and saw that she looked especially sulky today. We had been in close contact after the first three months of the plan, so I couldn’t really tell me if

something about her had changed.

She still looked the same. She looked a bit haggard today, which meant that she had been under a lot of stress recently. I was also aware that she was sleeping fewer hours than me, but it couldn't be helped because she was like the overall manager.

I wanted to make her rest for a bit, but I felt like everything would come to a halt if she were to stop what she was doing, so I couldn't possibly tell her to rest. Lee Ji-Hye wasn't just my eyes and ears; she was my hands and feet as well.

In other words, I couldn't let her leave my side.

"So, do you have a plan on how you want to move forward?" I asked.

"I'm thinking about it. I thought about just firing all of them, but right now, I have no idea what's going on. I did send an inspection team to the fifth zone, but who knows… I'm not sure if it'll be that effective, but their progress has slowed down, so there's definitely something going on behind the scenes. I have to listen to the details first since the fifth zone will tell us just how complicated things are," Lee Ji-Hye answered.

"You're saying something similar could be happening in the other zones as well, right?" I asked.

"Yes, so we should take our time in figuring this out," she replied.

"It's fine to figure it out, but… even if we missed something, how can we treat them better than this? I just can't understand it," I complained.

"I agree. I can't understand why they're complaining. Maybe we shouldn't have paid them properly from the start. They wouldn't have anything to say even if we had forced them to work. If we knew that they would complain no matter what we did, wouldn't it have been better if we had chosen to save money? They have to suffer for them to think that we're literally offering them paradise. Should we stop the thermal magic?" she asked.

"No. As much as possible, I want to avoid doing something that'll affect their work speed. If we force them to work, our situation would have been worse than this. It'll also ruin the image of the Committee," I replied.

“It would have been nice if the managers were the only problematic ones. I still want to have faith in humans. Really,” she said.

‘I don’t think you have the right to say that, but I somewhat agree with you.’

“Anyway, there are three possibilities,” she said.

“Yeah.”

“First, there’s an issue with the people in charge of the zones… Actually, we already know that there had always been an issue with the reports that they had been sending to us,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“Are you trying to hint at embezzlement here?” I asked.

“Yes. Otherwise, it doesn’t make sense why the workers are protesting,” she replied.

“I don’t know about you, but the corrupted bastards out there have to be dealt with accordingly,” I commented.

“I agree. The second possibility is that the workers are simply too greedy. I really hope this isn’t the case. Seriously,” she said.

“…”

“If that isn’t the case either… that means someone is behind this,” she said.

“I thought you said that’s unlikely because the logs are squeaky clean,” I mentioned.

“I think we just haven’t found it yet. I didn’t dismiss that possibility. Just because it’s not on Benigoa Net doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. We do have enemies… so it’s too early to dismiss that possibility,” she explained.

“And the solution?” I asked.

“Let’s wait for the investigation team first. I’m thinking about looking at the overall situation. I know I’ve said this before, but… I really don’t want to think that this is just a worker issue. I might just end up hating humans,” she replied.

‘I really don’t think you have any right to say that.’

“I thought I still had a long way to go before catching up to you, but take a look around and the world is filled with bastards. To be honest, the first possibility is highly unlikely…” she continued.

“Who’s the one responsible for the fifth zone?” I asked.

“Mikhail,” she answered.

“*Ah*”

‘Mikhail.’

We recruited him because we needed someone from the Federation. He was a famous soft-liner even within the Federation. He was basically a man of dignity and ideals. He was also a famous scholar. I actually worked hard to recruit him.

The first ten outposts were important. The first outpost was naturally the most important, so I had to put extra care into it. Still, I personally recruited the managers of the first ten outposts.

The fourth and fifth outposts weren’t as important as the other outposts, so I decided to recruit outsiders. I had to recruit one from the Republic and one from the Federation. I needed someone diligent, and Mikhail was perfect.

I was relieved when he finally accepted my offer.

‘It’s probably not him… ’

He wasn’t the type of person who would embezzle money.

His nature and unique habit also weren’t that remarkable.

“He’s known for being upright even within the Federation. Didn’t we do a background check on him as well?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“I didn’t find anything suspicious about him,” I replied.

“What should we do? Should we dig deeper?” she asked.

“Don’t put too much effort into this. He kept on declining me back them, even after I

offered him great benefits and high pay. Anyway, let's take a look and see if there's a mastermind behind all this. Actually, I think it's best if I meet him," I suggested.

"Yeah, call him here. While he's here, we should send people to the site," I added.

"That sounds great," she commented.

'Looks like I'll be meeting him before I meet the guild members.'

"Should I send a griffon right now?" she asked.

"Yeah, I think that's the best thing to do. Let's not make him think that we're interrogating him since it's likely that he'll prepare a lot of things," I replied.

"Alright. I'll just ask him to meet up for some tea," she said.

"Okay. Is that all?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Then, let's have dinner together," I suggested.

"I was going to eat light since I'm busy… but it's a different story because it's your offer. You're asking me out on a date, right? Oppa?" she asked.

"Think what you want," I replied.

I thought perhaps it would be fine to just follow Lee Ji-Hye's suggestion and get rid of them all.

Unfortunately, I had to avoid work disruptions. How were they managing the workers who were talking about protesting? The report also seemed haphazard now that I thought about it, so I couldn't help but feel curious.

"The fifth region…" I mumbled.

"Are you worried?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"Of course," I answered.

“Don’t be too stressed, oppa. I’m sure we can resolve it. It’s probably nothing,” she assured.

I also prayed that it was nothing. I really hope that it wasn’t a big deal.

CHAPTER 569
MIKHAIL (1)

“What does it say, Mr. Mikhail?” I[1] asked.

“It says that he wants to drink a cup of tea with me. I’m sure he’s not inviting me for tea out of boredom, so it looks like you guys were right,” Mikhail replied.

“Thank you for making the decision,” I said.

“I wouldn’t necessarily say that I have made a decision. I simply realized faster than others about what’s the right path for the Federation, the Republic, and the continent,” he said.

“However, we’re afraid that we might bring harm to your reputation. Actually, I feel guilty for even saying this,” I said.

“Everything will become useless once I die. It’s been a while since I stopped obsessing over fame or honor, unlike *him*. All of you are the same in my eyes,” he said.

“…”

“He was willing to put everything on the line for his honor. He was someone that could throw away his life for honor and fame. His way of life was something I couldn’t understand. *Haha*, I’m sure he’ll ridicule and mock me if he sees me right now,” he laughed.

“…”

“I have been living on the continent for a very long time. I settled on this continent before adventurers like you even stepped foot here. It was to the point that every nation on this continent became my hometown.

”I believed that your kind’s arrival would bolster the development of the continent, and I was right. It was the same for him. He was both a good and a bad influence,” he

added.

"…"

"Just like him… I thought Chairman Lee Ki-Young would become the cure of this continent," he added.

"You mean…"

"However, he doesn't know how to yield," he said.

"…"

"I became sure of it when he kept on asking me to take care of this place. He's the type of person who would become the cure if used properly and poison if used the wrong way.

"However, he's too greedy to become the cure of the continent. Look at this stupid hand mirror. You said something like this actually existed in your world, right? Anyway, can you believe it?" he questioned.

"…"

"Can you believe that this tiny item in my hand can control this continent? At first, the people of the continent were either fascinated or scared of it, but now, everyone is carrying this small mirror around. They can't go on with their daily lives without this small thing anymore. I'm sure the majority of people haven't realized it yet, but it contains a ton of data despite its small size.

"I'm sure that man—Lee Ki-Young—can see all that data. It means that he's observing the entire continent. The continent is under the control of one person," he explained.

"…"

"You can't call this freedom," he said.

"Right," I replied.

"You can't consider this kind of lifestyle as living. The continent is under the control

of one person, after all," he repeated.

"…"

"A long time ago, my friend told me an interesting story. It was a novel written by a famous author named George Orwell. The place we're living in right now is no different from the space that was mentioned in the novel.

"One man shouldn't be allowed to control the entire continent. Even articles that criticize him must be reviewed before they are published, and it's the same for the articles that praise him," he added.

"Yes, you're right," I said.

"I don't know what this Lee Ki-Young wants that he's going this far, but no one has the right to control one's freedom. At least that's what I think," he said.

"…"

"No, I'm sure you all can't empathize with me, and my friend can't empathize with me either because we have different values. My friend died for the sake of honor, and I'll probably die because of my stubbornness," he said.

"You won't die, Mr. Mikhail. It's our job to die, not yours," I told him.

"I'm still going to die even if our plan succeeds. The Sacred Democratic Country will keep on chasing me. Anyway, I need to leave right away tomorrow, so please leave. I'll return with the news that you all want," he said.

"…"

"…"

"Understood," I answered.

I took a step back and saw Mikhail reading a book quietly. I knew this was necessary, but I felt bitter because I wasn't sure if bringing that man in was the right thing to do.

'If I had known his thoughts, I shouldn't have given him an offer in the first place.'

We had contacted him with the determination to kill him in the worst-case scenario. If he had declined our offer, he would have already died.

However, it turned out that he was already prepared to die, so it was weird that we were empathizing and worrying about him

'You never know what could happen.'

I thought that perhaps it was because he gladly accepted our offer or his way of thinking seemed better than ours. I had no idea, and all I could do was grab my aching head.

'It's complicated.'

"It's bad to think too deeply about it. We just need to do our jobs."

"I'm not being swayed. If anything, I'm even more convinced because, besides my personal feelings, I finally understand why I have to fight. It's thanks to Mr. Mikhail. Of course, it won't be easy, and—" I explained.

"You're right. That's not the only reason we're fighting."

"Right? The continent will have no future at this rate. That man has control over everything, and I don't even know what's the truth and what are the lies anymore. Father Lee Ki-Young—no, Chairman Lee Ki-Young. I wonder how many people on this continent know his true character. However, I think that everyone here…"

"Yes, everyone here knows his true character, but it's definitely unbelievable based on his public image. I couldn't even believe it at first, and I'm sure that most people wouldn't believe it at first, either.

"The media and the press have been putting him up on a pedestal, so I'm sure everyone else has no idea that he's a cockroach that has been harming the continent.

"I mean, who could imagine that he's capable of summoning demons and impersonating a god to deceive the entire continent?"

"I don't understand why they're following a man like him…" I commented.

"It's best to scold his wickedness rather than scolding the people for their

foolishness."

"You're right," I said.

"I don't know exactly what his goal is…"

"Perhaps the results will speak for themselves. I think all this is just a facade. He must have created an imaginary threat so that it would be easier for him to control the continent.

"It was pretty clever of him to release this hand mirror, so I believe it's worth keeping that in mind.

"I believe that's also the reason why he withdrew from the Blue Guild and became the chairman. He only said a few things, but the articles quickly turned him into the most suitable leader of the continent.

"Even the powerful are wary of him because the dissidents are vanishing without traces," I explained."

"…"

"The voice of the people and free will is all under his control. The media and press are under his control as well, and he can publish information that's beneficial to him or hide information that is detrimental to him.

"We can also see what the people are talking about. I acknowledge that Lee Ki-Young is talented, but he's a bad leader. I was one of his supporters, but meeting all of you and Mr. Mikhail opened my eyes. If it hadn't been for all of you, I would have also…" I paused.

"I'm not doing this because of those values, Rafael. I don't know about my comrades, but at least I'm not like that. Revenge is what moves me, not some polished values. I somehow ended up here, but it's very different from what you're thinking."

It was indeed the case when we had just met, but I was definitely changing the closer we got to the truth behind the continent. Our goals were the same, but our hearts were different.

If revenge had been the impetus for their actions before, responsibility and nobility

were what were urging them to move at the moment.

I was sure they understood the difference better than anyone else, and I was sure that I was right unless there was something wrong with my eyes.

“Please don’t say that. I already know that you feel responsible, and it’s the same for everyone else. Revenge also isn’t enough to change the results. The journey doesn’t matter; what we’re doing is the right thing, after all. The continent will remember what our secret organization is trying to achieve,” I said.

“No, even if we succeed, we’ll be nothing more than terrorists.”

“That’s not a pleasant word. Terrorists. We’re fighting for justice, though…” I mumbled.

“*Haha*, I’m sure you’re the only person who thinks that way, Rafael.”

“So what’s going to happen next? If this fails, what are you planning on doing?” I asked.

“Nothing will change. We’re just going to wait for a chance and keep moving, but that won’t happen.”

“…”

“If I know him, he’s going to move the way we planned.”

“…”

“Like the general stated, he’s not a conspirator. He’s an actor and a fraud. His stage isn’t the battlefield or an office. His stage is the stage itself.

”That’s Lee Ki-Young’s true nature, so he won’t just sit by and watch. I’m sure he’s thinking of using this incident to promote himself because he stood to gain more if he did that.”

“Afterward…” I asked.

“We’ll fight with our lives. That’s it. If we don’t seize this opportunity, it’ll be virtually impossible for us to do this again. He has decided to stop participating in the Blue

Guild's affairs, but he still has influence over the guild.

"Once the soldiers from the joint training take their positions here, our secret organization's plan will go down the drain. We can get caught as well, so we have to seize this opportunity. We don't have much time left."

"…"

"…"

"Is there really no other way?" I asked.

"No, and he has to die if we want to change the status quo."

"But can't we do something else? We can create fliers and hand them out… or gather people who share the same view as us. If we continue raising our voices about the truth that we know, I'm sure the denizens will… someday realize it as well.

"I'm sure they will realize the truth one day. Look at the people in our organization. There's no need to force it using… extreme measures…" I explained.

"No, we'll be in danger if we do more things. We grew too big and too fast over the year. You should know better than anyone that it's a miracle that we still haven't caught his attention.

"We can't make any more moves. If we do, I'm sure the military will immediately charge in here. It's best if we simply carry out our plan rather than try to do something at this point. I'm sure the investigation team will come here while Mr. Mikhail is talking to him. Anyway, let's talk about this rather than other things, Rafael."

"But…!" I shouted.

"There's no other choice. Mr. Mikhail has already made a decision. If we back away now, all our plans will… *kgh*…"

"S-Sir, are you okay?" I asked.

"*Ha… ha…* Yeah, I'm fine. Don't worry, Rafael."

Our manager grabbed his chest in pain, and I felt ashamed by the fact that all I could do was pat his shoulders.

The secret organization. Our ultimate goal was to free the continent from Chairman Lee Ki-Young. We were fighting for what was right, but we were nothing more than an anti-government force.

'They'll recognize us someday.'

I grabbed my trembling chest, and I couldn't help but have useless thoughts about how everyone on this continent would never forget our sacrifice.

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1. Rafael's POV ☜

CHAPTER 570
MIKHAIL (2)

“May I come in?” Mikhail asked.

“Yes, come in. It’s been a while, Mr. Mikhail. I’m sorry for not contacting you more often. I’ve been pretty busy as well…” I[1] answered.

“I should’ve visited you first… I’m terribly sorry,” he said.

“Have a seat,” I offered.

“Okay.”

“What would you like to drink? We have everything, so feel free to choose whatever you want,” I told him.

“Anything is fine with me. I’d like to drink whatever you recommend, sir,” he said.

“In that case… This one should be nice. This tea is made out of strawberries endemic in the north. It’s kind of sweet, but it’s not too sweet. I think you’ve already tasted this tea, but I recommend it nonetheless. I’m obsessed with this tea, and I’m sure you’ll like it,” I explained.

“I appreciate it,” he said.

“You don’t have to say that; you’re making me feel embarrassed here. Anyway, how are things? How have you been doing recently?” I asked.

“It’s the same every day. I’m sure it’s not that different from you, sir. I start the day by drinking either tea or coffee, and I use the remaining time reading either the newspaper or a book. Of course, that’s the only free time that I have…

”The site is pretty big, so it feels like I’m managing a city because of the number of workers. It was also impressive how a market was naturally built and how it became a place for people to live,” he replied.

“I’m sure it’s the same for the other sites, Mr. Mikhail. The first and third sites are like big cities. I’m sure the places the technicians and workers can enjoy, eat, and play are better than most small cities.

”I wasn’t originally planning on building a city, but it feels nice that they were built naturally.

”If the workers were saving their remuneration, I’m sure those places wouldn’t have gotten so big. Making money, spending, paying taxes, and using that tax money to work on other things is how the economy works, don’t you agree?” I asked.

“Yes, you’re right, sir,” he answered.

“I’m actually pretty ignorant when it comes to economics and whatnot, but I knew that a market would naturally appear someday because people tend to gather in places where they can make money.

”That’s why I assigned each of the sites to people I can really trust,” I continued.

“I see,” he said.

“If I simply wanted someone in charge of the construction, I wouldn’t have contacted you. I know this sounds discriminatory, but I probably wouldn’t have hired a dwarf for the job. That’s the reason I organized a group of administrators, not builders,” I added.

“I understand what you’re saying,” he said.

“I don’t want to just receive reports about the progress of the construction. I want to know what’s going on there, how much is coming, and how much we’re spending. Even the smallest issues. That’s the reason I called you here,” I explained.

“I see.”

“Anyway, I told you all those because I was worried that you’d misunderstand,” I added.

“…”

“I know what you do and what you can do. If I were the slightest suspicious of your

abilities, I wouldn't have recruited you for that position. I assigned you that position because I thought you would be able to handle things without any issues," I told him.

"I'm ashamed," he confessed.

"I'm not trying to scold or pressure you. Just think of it as a passing comment from me. I guess I got agitated for no reason. Sorry about that. Anyway, is there anything related to this that you would like to tell me?" I asked.

"I'm sorry, but I don't really understand what it is you want to hear from me. It's true that there are some delays, but we're already working pretty fast.

"Of course, it's not like there aren't any internal issues, but I thought I could handle them, so I didn't report them," Mikhail explained.

"*Hm…*"

"…"

I examined his face and saw him making his usual expression.

'Should I consider this as him telling me the truth?'

It didn't seem like he was trying to convince me that he wasn't responsible for the strike, the slow progress, and the various small issues. It felt as if he were telling me to wait because he could handle those issues.

In addition, Mikhail didn't seem like he was having any issues doing his job.

'He's right, though.'

My other assumption was more convincing than assuming that he hadn't reported those issues to me because he was afraid of losing power. He was one of the best administrators out there, so it wasn't strange that he decided to refrain from reporting a small issue to me. After all, why bother reporting it if he could fix it quite easily anyway?

Of course, he would have to report worker strikes or other disastrous incidents, but I couldn't blame him for what he had done.

I regretted bringing it up because I thought that it made me look a bit ridiculous. I blushed a bit at the thought that perhaps I looked no different from a boss who was insisting on making his subordinates report every little detail because he couldn't trust them. He wasn't my people, but I did pick him.

I trusted him enough to give him that position, so I had to show him that I trusted him.

'It's just a strike.'

The strikers looked like it was only a matter of time until they calmed down, so I couldn't help but think about just ignoring those worker strikes completely. Of course, I didn't completely disregard the idea that it could boil over.

Still, I was aware that Lee Ji-Hye would bring results to me by any means necessary.

In other words, things would only get worse if I were to keep on trying to probe Mikhail here, especially if he wasn't involved in the worker strikes.

'Ji-Hye noona isn't going to like this.'

If the workers were truly the issue, I had to protect Mikhail.

I looked up, and our eyes met. He still looked the same as when we first met. He had a long, stylish beard, an upright demeanor, and unwavering as well as virtuous eyes. He looked like an intellectual, which made me feel like I could trust him.

'Yeah, let's just stop here.'

It was better to drop a hint later about the information he had withheld on the report.

"Looks like I got worried for no reason," I said.

"…"

"The order got flipped, but how about you eat with me? I'm sorry if I'm taking up your time even though you're already so busy. Anyway, I would really like to treat you to something," I suggested.

“Sure, let’s do that,” he said.

“How’s work? It’s been over a year, so I’m assuming you’ve acclimatized to it…” I asked.

“Not yet. I’m a bit embarrassed to say this, but it’s difficult. It’s not an ordinary city, so there were many surprises,” he replied.

“But you’ve been leading them pretty well,” I complimented.

“I still need more experience, and it’s not like I’m perfect,” he said.

“*Hm*, I won’t talk about the details since you said you’re able to handle it on your own, but managing people is difficult because even though everyone is heading toward the same goal, they can all have different thoughts. I don’t know what’s on your mind while you’re managing the site, but… I believe that part is important,” I told him.

“What? What do you…” Mikhail asked.

“I’m saying that it’s important to make people think that we’re thinking of the same thing,” I answered.

“I… see…” he mumbled.

“That’s human nature. Humans want to be in the majority. People who think they’re a minority or those who are unique from other people think the same as well.

”People feel secure being a part of the majority, especially when they have to face a problem or handle a difficult situation. Right now, I’m sure no one wants to be part of the minority,” I continued.

“…”

“I believe that’s the behavior of humans. If internal issues aren’t resolved properly, I don’t think it’s a bad idea to use my words as a reference,” I said.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he said.

“Well, I’m sure you’ll do well… You can just use it as a reference. I’m embarrassed

because I feel like I'm repeating myself, but it's not because I don't trust you at all, Mr. Mikhail.

"I'm the type who gets kind of stressed… if I don't resolve the issue myself. I told myself several times that I have to fix it myself, but it's difficult," I confessed.

"…"

"Let's get something to eat and talk about things aside from work," I suggested.

"Okay."

We took a seat and started eating. If I were eating by myself, I would have already wolfed down my food, but I wanted to let him know that I was being considerate to him, so I made sure to eat at his pace. It was also my way of apologizing for the unnecessary misunderstanding. However, it seemed that he still hadn't noticed my actions.

"How's your wife doing?" I asked.

"She's… doing fine," he answered.

"I see. I was worried that she was feeling uncomfortable living there, but I guess she's doing great like you said," I said.

"…"

'Why isn't he reacting?'

He looked slightly uncomfortable, and I got this feeling in my gut that something bad had happened recently in his home. It wasn't great to keep talking about topics he wasn't comfortable with, so I continued the conversation by bringing up many different topics.

However, the problem was that those conversations ended quickly. Perhaps he was an intellectual, but he was serious, and he seemed like he would be boring even at parties. I cracked multiple great jokes, but all he did was smirk…

'He's hard to get along with.'

However, I wanted to get along with him.

“When will they arrive here? I mean, the soldiers from the joint training,” Mikhail asked.

“A month later,” I replied.

“I see…” he said.

“I’m sure you think I’m crazy since a sane person wouldn’t just suddenly go to the north of the continent and use a large amount of money to build an outpost. I’m sure you’re thinking that I have other motives,” I said.

“That’s not true, sir,” he denied.

“*Haha*, it’s fine. It is Goddess Benigoa’s prophecy, but I’m sure many people throughout the continent are still skeptical about it. I know that’s how you feel as well,” I told him.

“No, I…”

“You don’t have to deny it. I’m sure a part of you is feeling doubtful. I would have felt the same if I were you, and the workers working at the site right now probably feel the same as well. The threat is still far away, so… it’s natural for the majority to feel that way. It’s not easy to make enemies of things you can’t see, after all,” I explained.

“…”

“The threat exists. I’m telling you this with my life… It’s the truth,” I added.

“…”

“What you’re doing right now won’t go to waste, so please hang in there just a little longer. Once everything is over, I guarantee that you’ll be treated well,” I said.

“Thank you,” he said.

We talked about many different things, but the air between us was still awkward. I tried to find things to talk about and things we could do together since he had come all the way here. However, the air between us remained awkward.

I also couldn't just say that we had to leave because we were done eating. Indeed, we were done eating, and we were no longer talking as well, so I figured that perhaps Mikhail had already noticed the awkward air between us.

This awkwardness was suffocating, and it seemed that he felt uncomfortable about it as well because he said, "If you don't mind, how about we play Chess to pass the time?"

I hesitated. *'Those who have played games with me all met bad endings.'*

However, it sounded like a great idea to dispel the awkwardness.

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1. Lee Ki-Young's POV ☜

CHAPTER 571
MIKHAIL (3)

A game was the best at getting rid of the awkwardness between two people. My chess friend Jo Hye-Jin was helping with the joint training, so the chessboard in my office had done nothing but collect dust over the year.

I couldn't help but recall that man who left the world after becoming a public enemy, but this was a different situation than at the time because I was trying to build a rapport with Mikhail rather than turn him into a public enemy.

"I think that's a great idea," Mikhail said and nodded. He sat quietly on the other side of the table. I fetched the chessboard and laid it on the table. The chess pieces that the dwarves had created themselves were on the chessboard.

The chess pieces were kind of different from the average chess pieces, but they wouldn't hinder the game. They had an antique and slight fantasy feel to them, so they were definitely eye candies.

"I got it as a gift," I told him.

Mikhail looked up at me with an expression that seemed to be saying—when did I ask?

I felt embarrassed, so I said, "I'll go first."

"Sure," he said and nodded.

'Yeah, it's great that we decided to play chess.'

The suffocating awkwardness slowly disappeared, and guys our age would often get closer by playing games. He looked really focused on the game, and I poured everything I had the moment we started playing, but…

'Man, why is this guy so good?'

He was better than I thought, and he was stronger than me, even though I had played many games with Jo Hye-Jin. The tables had turned.

I was desperately trying to stop him from taking my pieces, but he had a lead in the game. It was difficult to explain, but in a way, he was playing by the book; his playstyle was perfectly suited to his personality. I wanted to pull a fancy move, but I decided not to do so because I wanted to win.

In the end, I had no choice but to play dirty.

When I buckled down and moved my pawns seriously, the game started to change.

I would be able to break his rhythm if I were to get aggressive, so I moved my pawns to the front and somehow took care of the pieces in the important spot and moved my pawns in an orderly manner.

I threw out my pawns to try to tempt him because I wanted to make sure that he would have to sacrifice something to obtain something.

"You're good at using your pawns," I said.

'I thought I've gotten pretty good… but there is indeed a difference in our skills.'

I had fought many prominent figures, which boosted my confidence, but it seemed like those bastards were holding back to amuse me.

"They don't look important, but pawns are the most important pieces in chess. They're known for simply guarding the front without doing much, but they do a lot more in the latter half of the game. You seem to be throwing your pawns out carelessly, sir," Mikhail explained.

"*Hm…*"

Mikhail wasn't using his pawns carelessly. He would group them up to create a barrier and hold the game together. Sometimes, he would give up on the important pieces to try to push forward with the grouped-up pawns.

I had the advantage in terms of points, but he didn't seem worried about it.

And composure was exactly the difference between him and Jo Hye-Jin…

Jo Hye-Jin would always get startled the moment I started playing dirty, even though there was no reason for her to panic. It was easy to provoke her and take advantage of her emotions to kill her king. Unfortunately, Mikhail was the opposite of her.

He was steady, and he was always moving forward. In other words, he was a difficult opponent. We were taking the same number of pieces, but his defenses were sturdy.

The game progressed, and my defenses on the left side of the board were getting weaker as time went on. I had no choice but to hop onto his rhythm and block his army. I was doing my best, but it was of no use.

His pawns marched forward, despite the bait that I had thrown out.

I tried to stop him by sacrificing my pieces, but one of his pawns managed to reach the edge.

'Ha… '

It was a rare sight.

"I'll promote it to Queen," he said.

"Okay."

It was over.

"Checkmate," he said.

"I lost," I said.

It looked like a close game, but it was a one-sided slaughter if one were to take a closer look at the details.

"You're good, Mr. Mikhail," I complimented.

"That's not true," he commented.

'How are you going to explain this game, then?'

"I was just lucky. It would be nice if I were always this lucky. Unfortunately, it's

impossible to get lucky in every game," he continued.

I couldn't deny that because every game was different, but Mikhail was definitely a skilled player.

"I'm embarrassed. I thought I had improved, but it seems that I was just arrogant," I told him.

"That's not true. You're definitely strong, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. There were many times when you had the advantage," he denied.

"What do you think was the problem?" I asked.

"It's like I said earlier. Well, I wouldn't exactly call it a problem, but… saying that your strength is your weakness is the best way to describe it. You seem to be obsessed with making good trades," he replied.

"A good trade?" I asked.

"Yes. You play the game by listing the pieces in order…" he answered.

"*Ah*."

"Of course, I'm not saying that's wrong because making a good trade means you're in a higher position than others. However, I feel like you're ignoring the basics a little too much. Pawns are the basics and the core…

"They seem like nothing and just pieces you can throw away, but as you've seen, they're pivotal. If you had focused even about twenty percent more attention on them, it would have been much easier for you," he explained.

"Your words are helpful. Yes… I can see the problem now. In the end, the Queen ended the game, but until the halfway point—yes, it was unfortunate. How about another game? *Ah*, is it too late?" I asked.

"We might end up staying up the whole night if we play more… I would like to spend time with you as well, but I can't be away for too long because of the issues I still have to handle…" Mikhail answered.

'This guy just wants to quit because he's ahead.'

I wanted to be shameless and scream—You can't leave until I win!

However, it was for the best to stop here. Each lasted really long, so we would most likely end up staying up all night if we played. Both Mikhail and I also had work to do tomorrow.

'Yeah, let's stop here.'

"Once the issues are taken care of, I'll invite you again, Mr. Mikhail," I said.

"I'm looking forward to the day we meet again," he said.

"Please send my regards to your family… Actually, I'll invite your wife as well next time, *haha*." I laughed.

"We'll surely… come," he muttered.

"I won't see you out, so just be careful on your way back. And this is my gift to you," I offered.

"This is…"

"This is a token of my appreciation, so please accept it. I know you're not used to this kind of thing, but I hope you'll accept it…" I explained.

"…"

"It's not much. It's just a simple gift," I added.

"I… appreciate it," he said.

"It's been a while since I had this much fun. I'll be waiting for news that is just as great as the time we spent today," I told him.

"Well then, I'll be off…" he said.

"*Ah*, we prepared a griffon driver, so please ride a griffon home. It'll be a comfortable ride," I informed him.

"…Okay."

Mikhail looked slightly anxious as he left, so it seemed that I had put quite a lot of burden on his shoulders. Anyway, I had more fun than I thought, and more importantly…

'We had a nice game.'

Mikhail was exactly what I had expected. He showed his resolve to fix the issues, which made me feel happy.

I went over to the chessboard and examined it, but Jo Hye-Jin suddenly called me.

'It's been a while.'

I picked up the call. It had been quite a while since I saw her face. Her hair was still tied up. She was still giving off a scary impression, but her overall demeanor was pristine. Of course, she looked tired as well, which was understandable given her job.

Anyway, I was curious about why she suddenly called me.

"Please contact me more often and not just when you have things to report to me."

- I'm really busy, Sub Guild Master.

"So… what's wrong? Did Mr. Hyun-Sung…"

I was about to ask if Kim Hyun-Sung had another message for me, but she interrupted me.

- No, it has nothing to do with the guild master. I simply called to see how you're doing and… I have things to report regarding leading the soldiers. The details are pretty simple, so I didn't necessarily have to call you, but—*hm*? Did you play chess?

"I had a guest," I told her.

- They beat you up pretty badly.

"How did you know I lost?" I asked.

- It's pretty obvious when thinking about your skills. I can tell you how you lost the game. You tried to startle your guest to no avail.

“You really have no right to say that,” I commented.

- What?

“Have you already forgotten our games together? You lost a lot before you could do anything,” I said.

- 248 wins and 246 loses. If you consider the overall score, I…

“I can’t believe you memorized the scores. You just have to memorize the recent games. Who was the one who lost three games and got sad about it?” I said.

- Hey, I told you not to quit while you’re ahead. Have you already forgotten that you ran away?

“Playing against a weaker opponent was boring, so I rejected your offer. I didn’t run away. I just don’t want to play against noobs. *Hahaha*!” I laughed.

-…

“*Hahaha*.”

- *Uh… Ugh…*

“*Hahaha*. I wonder if our Hye-Jin has improved since the last time we played,” I said jokingly.

- S-Stop laughing like that. It makes me want to hit you.

“You should beat me in chess, not with violence. You won’t improve if you use your fists to talk,” I said.

- Let’s play again. Yeah, let’s do it. Who would remember the game that happened a year ago?

“Me. *Hahaha*.”

- We’re going to play once I get there with the troops. I’ll see you then.

“Yeah, I’m not playing with a noob,” I commented.

- *Ugh…* Y-You… bastard… You're dead…

"What?" I asked.

- Just wait… I'll crush you so hard that you won't speak of this again.

"Yeah, next time, noob," I said.

- *Click.*

I wanted to use Jo Hye-Jin as a rebound for my pain, but it seemed that she couldn't handle my words because she ended the call arbitrarily. Of course, she was already worked up, so I couldn't really do that.

'Wait, didn't she have something to report to me?'

I would probably receive that report through Lee Ji-Hye.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

As expected, someone knocked on the door.

CHAPTER 572
MIKHAIL (4)

'How much does Lee Ki-Young know? Why did he call me here?'

Bad thoughts filled my[1] head.

'That bastard is like the devil. No, he's the incarnation of the devil!'

I trembled upon recalling what happened just now, and my trembling got worse when I recalled his eyes, which seemed like they were capable of seeing through everything as well as his smile that made it seem like he already knew everything.

The organization told me everything that he had done and the kind of person he was. No, my assumptions about him had to have been correct because the organization wouldn't have contacted me otherwise.

I had established a connection with the true demon summoner, but it wouldn't have been enough for the organization to contact me. The organization was putting their lives on the line, so I had to do the same as well.

I already knew that this would be difficult, and we would eventually meet a gruesome ending, but…

"*Whoo…*"

Things were beyond what I had imagined.

"Please send my regards to your family… Actually, I'll invite your wife as well next time, haha."

He was threatening me. I wasn't aware of just what he knew, but what he said was definitely a threat.

"If I were the slightest suspicious of your abilities, I wouldn't have recruited you for that position. I assigned you that position because I thought you would be able to handle

things without any issues."

It was suspicious that he told me that he was aware of what I was doing and my capability. The organization said that the Blue Guild had never found any traces of them since the core members parted ways, but I couldn't believe them.

After all, the Blue Guild's influence was massive.

'I'm sure they're already aware of the organization.'

And that was exactly why I was cautious, and I was even more disturbed upon realizing that he had been sending me signs. Unfortunately, I couldn't understand why he was sending me those signs.

However, if Lee Ki-Young was unaware of the organization's goal, his threats had to be directed at me exclusively. It was a warning that I had to manage the construction site properly and a threat to urge me to handle the situation as soon as possible. Perhaps he had decided to give me a second chance, and this could be my last chance, but…

'Was that really it'

I thought about the people who had inexplicably disappeared after standing up against me, and I couldn't help but think that I would have the same ending as them.

It was highly likely that he had given me a second chance for entertainment's sake. I couldn't help but think that he had done that to see the person he would kill with his own hands perform a last stand before their death.

I couldn't say for sure, but it was possible considering Chairman Lee Ki-Young's personality and the path of carnage that he had been walking on even now.

The former executives of the Blue Guild, His Majesty the Emperor and Her Highness of the Benigoa Holy Empire, the so-called demon worshiper and demon summoner, the victims of the demon summoning incident in Laios, the undead made from the Republic's corpses, and the victims of the 27th Legion summoning incident.

He had killed so many people before, but there was still a multitudinous number of deaths that had never been reported. Chairman Lee Ki-Young was the type of person that would never compromise and would always be ruthless to his enemies.

'I'm not afraid of losing my life, but what about my wife?'

What about my lovely wife, who trusted me and followed me? I had never regretted my decision, but I started questioning if I was even walking on the right path.

It had been several hours already since I sat in this small office of mine, but I was still having many different thoughts. I grabbed my head, but I couldn't figure out what I should do and if it would be correct for me to abandon my beliefs.

'If I disband the organization… '

I could return to Lee Ki-Young's side if I got lucky, but was that the right decision? How could I justify abandoning those who had been working with their lives on the line for the continent?

"God… Oh, God, help me…" I muttered.

There was a *click*, and the door to my office opened slowly. I thought it was an assassin, so I grabbed the dagger from one of my drawers, but I saw someone I didn't expect to see.

"Honey."

It was my lovely wife, Natalie.

She looked worried as she said, "You stayed here longer than usual, so I got worried."

"…"

"I know I'll only get in the way of your work, but I'm really worried. Are you okay? I heard you met with Chairman Lee Ki-Young today… Did he…" Natalie asked.

"No, it's nothing you need to concern yourself with, so don't worry too much. I was just taking care of the issues I had told you earlier. You must have been worried. You can go first. I'll be right there…" I told her.

"But… recently…" she mumbled.

"It's really nothing, honey. You really don't have to worry," I reassured her.

“I don’t think it’s nothing. You seem to be overdoing it recently…” she commented.

“…”

“Are you really not going to tell me?” she asked.

“…”

“Really?”

“…”

“*Whooo*, I think you really need a break, honey,” she suggested.

“No, that’s…”

“How about having some wine? It’ll help you relax…” she asked.

“I’m not in the mood…”

“Chairman Lee Ki-Young sent a special wine,” she mentioned.

“Don’t… touch that, Natalie. Don’t…” I told her.

“I know why you’re acting this way, so I…”

“Shit!” I cursed.

Bang!

Crash!

“I told you not to touch it. Shit! You didn’t drink it, right? Please tell me you didn’t. Please… Oh god. Oh god. Shit! I shouldn’t have left it there… Shit, shit, oh god…!” I yelled.

“…”

“Hurry up and answer me… You really didn’t drink it, right?” I asked.

“I knew it…” Natalie said.

“What?” I asked.

“Y-You really must’ve thought that I didn’t know anything,” she stuttered.

“What… what are you…”

“I’m not stupid. I know very well what you’re doing, what you’re thinking about, and why you’re hesitating. We can’t always be together, but I’ve always been the closest person to you…” she answered.

“…”

“I love you,” she confessed.

“…”

“I love you for never giving up your beliefs and working toward what you think is right. I know very well what you’re thinking about and what’s blocking your path. If that reason is the same as the one I’m thinking about, please don’t look back. I want you to continue,” she continued.

“…”

“I’m not staying by your side to be your burden. I just want to walk with you. You don’t have to send me away or try to hide me. You don’t need to talk to people who share the same vision with you about my safety. We just need to walk together. If our situation were flipped, I know you would try to help me. We promised to walk together forever, right?” she asked.

“Natal…”

“I’ll head out now. What I said earlier was the truth, honey. Don’t think about it. Just walk toward what you think is right because that’s the Mikhail that I know,” she added.

Click.

When I looked down, I saw the broken cup and traces of the wine. I looked up with a

blank stare, but I didn't see anything. I saw nothing. I still couldn't tell what was the right thing to do, but I had to make a choice. I wasn't sure whether I was going to regret it or not because it was something I could tell once it was all over.

"Conviction."

Yeah, conviction. I decided to do what I believed was right.

* * *

"Belief? What, can you eat that? Or can you make money with it? I hate people who are obsessed with things like that. They are seriously annoying," Lee Ji-Hye complained.

I[2] honestly wasn't expecting much, but I wasn't happy about the plan that fell through. She looked as if she had expected it, so she probably wasn't expecting a big result.

"Isn't Kim Hyun-Sung like that as well?" she asked.

"No, he's not. And he actually knows how to compromise. He's the master of compromising. Anyway, you're saying that those gramps were being stubborn, right?

"Those old dwarves are known for their stubbornness, but why are they making a big deal about not using magic? Don't they know how much time it'll save them?" I complained.

"They're saying that there could be a problem with the quality, so we couldn't keep pushing them to use magic. We're using magic stones, after all… and those gramps aren't exactly wrong, either… They also said that they'd finish in time…" she replied.

"*Ah*…"

"They said dwarves had never used magic to craft, so it can't be helped. They said to ask the elves for help if that's what we want. I think compromising is the right thing to do here… As long as they finish it in time, isn't that all that matters?" she asked.

"But still…" I mumbled.

"They're actually pretty fast, and most importantly, they're artisans, so won't it be

more efficient? I'm tired of dealing with those gramps as well. You should go and talk to them," she suggested.

"I don't get along with dwarves," I told her.

"They seem to like you, though… Well, it can't be helped," she commented.

"Let's think about that later. I'll send Deok-Gu or someone else later," I said.

"*Ah*, I have a feeling that they'll get along. Anyway, this is my next report. It's the main one," she said.

'Yeah, this is the main part.'

"How was it for you?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

I wanted to tell her that it was fine because I didn't really find anything strange. Mikhail had said confidently that he would take care of the internal issues himself. He even accepted my gift, and we enjoyed our time together.

'We even played chess.'

I could say that we had gotten a lot closer, and I suggested that we meet again, so he was probably waiting for my next invitation.

"Well, it wasn't that bad… But my opinion isn't important. How was it?" I asked.

"Well…" she paused.

"What?"

"I couldn't really find anything," she replied.

"I knew it…" I commented.

"But I want to take another look," she added.

"…?"

"It was kind of strange that I couldn't find anything. It's so clean that I feel like

they're hiding something. It was kind of frustrating because I couldn't see anything on the outside.

"I can't exactly pinpoint and say what it was, but I'm sure that site has its reasons. It wasn't… an actual strike, but their work has definitely slowed down…" she answered.

"I see," I said.

"The way they treat their workers is definitely different from the other sites," she added.

"…"

"One thing I'm sure of is that there's something wrong with that man named Mikhail. I don't know about the others, but I'm sure there's something wrong with him," she said.

"…"

'I loved you, Mikhail. Shit… '

The chess board we used to build our friendship and the warm and deep conversations we shared—those moments suddenly popped up in my mind.

'That bastard.'

"If we search, I'm sure we'll find something fishy. Actually, I'm sure something will appear internally before we're done looking," she said.

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1. Mikhail's POV ☜

2. Lee Ki-Young's POV ☜

CHAPTER 573
PROTEST (1)

“Internally?” I asked.

“I’m saying there's a possibility the situation could get worse. I know it’s questionable if the situation will even become that serious, but the workers aren’t getting the benefits they’re supposed to get. They’ll slow down even further, and the protests may get extreme,” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

“Didn’t you tell me just now that you want to take another look? Are you at the point that you can be certain of those claims?” I questioned.

“Yes, I’m certain of it. Either way, it’s undeniable that management is a mess… Based on the situation, I’m sure Mikhail is experiencing some kind of issue. The problem is proof,” she replied.

“Proof…” I mumbled.

“I’m sure of the situation, but I have no proof. The pie that the technicians and the workers were supposed to get suddenly disappeared, but I couldn’t find any traces of where the pie went. It’s obvious who ate that pie, but… it doesn’t make sense that I can’t find it. It was taken care of so smoothly that I almost missed it,” she continued.

“If that’s how you felt, it means that they’re talented,” I commented.

“I don’t know, but they’re pretty skilled at building up a slush fund. I’m tracking the flow of their funds as best as I can, but… they laundered their money so well that I can’t tell how they did it. They’re so good I think they can make a business out of it,” she added.

“Mikhail didn’t seem greedy, so it’s surprising,” I told her.

It was really surprising because his unique habit and nature were normal. I didn’t completely believe the status window, but he was a great person overall.

I had overlooked the possibility that even good-natured people could commit crimes and how humans could make a mistake under the right conditions. I couldn't help but think that he was coerced. He either received an offer that he couldn't decline, or he simply needed money as soon as possible.

'I'm not sure whether he's skilled or stupid.'

We wouldn't have noticed what he was doing if he had embezzled the funds slowly. It was actually strange that he didn't do that, even though he was perfectly capable of doing it and hiding it.

In other words, there was something fishy going on.

'I have a good eye.'

One part of me was proud because I had discovered a talent, but the issue was that he was using his talent elsewhere.

"It looks like I haven't been paying enough attention. I thought I got rid of all the rats," I said.

"You're not some god. There's no way you can manage this large continent without making any mistakes. This isn't your fault. It's more like a problem with the system we created. We rushed things by creating the Continental Protection Management Committee. Haste will more often than not make waste, and Mikhail did a good job at using that weakness.

"I honestly didn't think that we'd encounter something like this, so I don't think you're the problem," she explained.

"But, still…" I mumbled.

"You don't have to feel guilty. It was out of our range. Who could've known that this would happen? Anyway, I'm really curious. I'm really curious about his motives, and I'm even more curious about where the money went.

"My curiosity is born from how he had never really done something like this. Of course, there's a high chance that he's squeaky clean just because I still haven't dug deep enough." she added.

“You think you can find something?” I asked.

“I’ll force it if I have to. Figuring out what happened by myself is the best, but it’s the second-best option. There’s no need to give myself a headache by questioning everything. Just going over there and using violence will resolve the issue. Of course, if they’re this meticulous, it’s highly likely that they’re ready to respond against police intervention or an audit from the Committee.

”It’ll be best to take care of them officially because people won’t talk about it too much if that were to happen, but what can we do? Should we make some time and counterattack? Or should we just blow them up?” she asked.

“I want you to take another look. I’m sure we’ll get something if we dig deep enough. I’m not sure how or where they’re laundering the money, but take a look at where Mikhail used to work a long time ago… Did you do a background check on his family?” I asked.

“Just the basics. Let’s see… he doesn’t have any children. His wife’s name is Natalie… They’re childhood friends. I wasn’t really interested in this man’s love life, but his wife is suffering from infertility, which is interesting.

”I think it’s surprising that he didn’t get a second wife. It probably isn’t easy considering the society we live in… He’s completely different from a certain someone,” Lee Ji-Hye commented.

“…”

“This woman isn’t special. She just does her job as his wife, and she’s the type to wait for her husband. She’s the typical old-fashioned housewife. I don’t think we’ll find much from her, but… I’ll look into her as well,” she added.

“Yeah, do that. If the issue isn’t with the leader, the leader’s people must be the ones causing the issues. We might be in that kind of situation,” I said.

What are you going to do about it?” she asked.

“Do I really have to say the obvious? How long do you think it’ll take you to investigate?” I asked.

“Who knows? I can’t tell you exactly, but I’ll get it done as fast as possible,” she

answered.

"Actually, what if I do it myself? I can go there and pretend like I'm on patrol or something," I suggested.

"You don't have to do that. Rather than going back and forth, appearing at the crucial moment to handle the situation makes you look cooler, don't you agree? The conflict will only get worse if you go there," she answered.

"I mean, if they're onto something, too… I think they might be watching us as well… More importantly, I don't want this situation to get worse…" I told her.

"*Hm*, so you want to handle this quietly," she mumbled.

"I want to avoid any actions that might disrupt the site. It honestly doesn't matter if the public finds out, but…" I trailed off.

"You want me to do my best rather than going for the second-best option? I'll try my best to gather proof and then prosecute them, then…" she said.

"Yeah, let's do that," I said.

Honestly, letting the public know about this wasn't bad because I could show my influence a bit more on the continent, and it could also be a warning to others.

However, it was already a massive protest.

'The situation isn't that great.'

I didn't like to take a step back to move forward two steps or take a step back to observe the situation.

A warning was sent out at the right time, so I was sure that Mikhail was doing his best to handle it.

While he was handling the issues I had highlighted, we would collect proof and resolve the issues by prosecuting him. He wouldn't be able to do multiple things at once, so he would definitely struggle to respond. Meanwhile, Lee Ji-Hye could move more flexibly, so wouldn't it be better for her to gather more proof before we made a move?

'I think it hurt her pride a bit, though… '

She said that I didn't have to worry and the issue was the system we had created, but Ji-Hye noona wasn't the type to just move on nonchalantly. I couldn't help but think that her pride was slightly hurt when she failed to find anything despite her meticulous search.

"Exclude me from other tasks for the time being. I want to focus on this one," Lee Ji-Hye requested.

"Okay. You can do whatever you want," I said.

"What? What was that all of a sudden?" she asked.

"It's nothing," I said.

"Okay. I'll get started now since I want to take care of this on my own. You don't have to help me," she said.

"All right. I can't just focus on you, anyway. Now that I think about it, I should recruit more people," I said.

"How about bringing Miss Kim Mi-Young here?" she suggested.

"She's busy taking care of the administration work at the Blue Guild," I told her.

"That's unfortunate. Things would have been a lot easier if she were here," she commented.

Lee Ji-Hye was right. I had been handing over some of my tasks here to Lee Ji-Hye.

Lee Sang-Hee, Sun Hee-Young, and Hwang Jung-Yeon were there to help Kim Mi-Young, but I couldn't imagine the Blue Guild's administration team without Kim Mi-Young. If I were to bring her here for my own sake, I was sure that rumors would blossom. It was tempting, but I had no choice.

Anyway, Lee Ji-Hye left the office. She pretended to be okay, but she had to be really hurt. She left without giving me a kiss, so I couldn't help but think that there were issues.

Still, I was convinced that she would soon find something because she was so diligent and meticulous, but…

“Give me more time,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

Tomorrow…

“Shit, fucking bastard! I’m so frustrated. That piece of shit…” she cursed.

Four days later…

“Man, where did he hide it?! Am I going crazy? It has to be here somewhere. I’m sure they’re moving the money away somewhere…” she said.

The issue was that she couldn’t bring any results.

I could understand her frustration. According to her, they would escape the moment they realized that their cover was blown. Lee Ji-Hye had been digging around excitedly, but every treasure chest she had encountered so far from her digging had turned out to be empty.

In other words, it wasn’t strange that she felt like going crazy.

Time passed, and she got more and more frustrated.

She continued cursing at herself.

Meanwhile, Mikhail was on the roll stabilizing the construction site he was managing.

It was only a matter of time before Mikhail stabilized the construction site, and by then, Lee Ji-Hye would find it difficult to move flexibly.

And that was why she had been desperately searching for proof of Mikhail’s money laundering…

Two weeks later, I saw her grinning at me in satisfaction.

“Let’s summon them here and prosecute them officially,” Lee Ji-Hye suggested.

“You found something?” I asked.

“Yes, I know I’m kind of late, but I found something. I decided to go back to the basics and took another look. That was when I noticed that I missed a certain someone. It was Natalie,” he replied.

“What?” I asked.

“I thought she was stupid because she seemed timid… Mikhail is one thing, but that woman is something else as well,” she answered.

“So, how are they getting the money?” I questioned.

“You can check the document for the details. It’s complicated, so it’ll be tiring for me to explain every detail. In a nutshell, Natalie has some connections with the corrupted members of the union. I have no idea whether she’s moving based on Mikhail’s orders or if she’s moving on her own. Actually, this could all be Mikhail’s smokescreen.

“Anyway, we can use this as evidence. If you convert all the funds that they had taken, it’s a pretty huge amount. I guess she’s bolder than I initially thought.

”I wanted to take more time because there was something bothering me, but we should be able to save time by just arresting them as soon as possible and investigating them later.

”At that point, we could recover their entire fund rather than just a part of it,” she explained.

“That’s good. So what’s bothering you?” I asked.

“I suffered a lot, so I’m worried that things are going too smoothly. I’m thinking that perhaps they have a different goal… Yeah, these thoughts have been bothering me, but I don’t think you have to be worried about those.

“Anyway, I need help to figure out the exact details,” she answered.

“*Hm*…”

“Anyway, my suffering ends here. I’m going to rest today. I’ll get the media working.

We'll publish the articles, and I'll officially—"

Knock, knock.

Lee Ji-Hye and I looked at each other with a startled look. I had warned people not to try to enter my office unless there was an emergency. In other words, something serious had to have happened because they were knocking on the door.

"Come in," I answered.

"I'm sorry for interrupting your meeting."

"…"

"*Um*… Zone Five has started protesting."

'What? I thought that place is stabilizing… '

"Force is being used to disperse the protesters…"

'Why is this happening all of a sudden?'

"The workers and the technicians aren't backing out either."

'Shit, this is… ' I frowned upon seeing the video that the messenger gave to me.

Barkdeku—the fighter of democracy—no, he had become a part of the labor movement.

'Shit, does this bastard think that he's an activist or something?'

CHAPTER 574
PROTEST (2)

'What is this bastard… '

I knew Park Deok-Gu was somewhere doing something useless, and it seemed that it was too much for me to expect that he would come to me without doing something outrageous.

'Shit… '

I couldn't help but think that he was probably doing some quest that some village chief gave to him. Who would expect him to be at the center of a construction site that was so large it could be considered a large city? It was ridiculous how he was grabbing the attention of the crowd while wearing a bandana.

Wait, where did he recruit that mage?

I wasn't sure whether he was Barkdeku or Bark Sergei, but one thing I was sure of was that he looked like a worker who had been working at Zone Five for a long time with that long and bushy beard of his.

His muscles were so large that they looked like they were about to explode, and those muscles could only be made through hard labor.

Arkimo was next to him with a grim look, looking like he was about to confront an army of corrupted people.

'Why the hell is Kim Ye-Ri there? Ah, shit. Why is everyone there? Did they make plans to meet there?'

Yetni Koba was there as well. I thought she was at the joint training with Jo Hye-Jin and Kim Hyun-Sung, but she was suddenly at Zone Five. Even more outrageous was that she seemed to have become the goddess of workers that the workers cherished.

'I need to stop them from moving together like that. They sure are enjoying themselves.'

I wasn't sure, but I started to understand how their laziness turned into a protest. Zone Five was already at its limit, so they had to have decided to meet up and stand with the workers.

Their actions definitely caught Mikhail off guard. He was trying to fix the issues so that he could live to see another day, but right now, he was probably trembling in fear.

'Ha, shit… '

He probably thought that handling it quietly was the best decision, but it couldn't be done anymore. I thought it wasn't that bad, but Lee Ji-Hye frowned. I could understand why she was frowning. After all, she had been working hard until now.

Of course, what she had discovered wasn't useless, but the hardships she had to go through had ended up being a waste of time because the situation had escalated, anyway.

'I'm sure it won't really matter.'

She had to have recalled the hardships she had to go through because her cheeks started trembling. She was trying to handle them as quietly as possible, but her efforts had gone down the drain.

I had never been afraid of Lee Ji-Hye until now.

The messenger felt nervous and quietly left the room.

"Shit! Shit!" Lee Ji-Hye screamed.

Crash!

Lee Ji-Hye hurled a glass cup to the ground.

"Ah!" She gasped and caught herself. She stared at me worriedly, but I had already seen the side of her that I was sure she didn't want me to see. She had always been the type of person who cared about her image, so the turn of events had to have surprised her to the point that she briefly forgot about maintaining her image.

"My hand slipped," Lee Ji-Hye said.

“Right,” I said.

‘So she does have a temper.’

I had forgotten about it, but she was definitely the same masked woman of her past life.

If she were alone, she would have destroyed the room.

“*Ahem…*”

“My hand really slipped, so don’t worry about it. It’s best if you forget what you saw just now, oppa,” she suggested.

“*Ah*, sure…” I mumbled.

“I’m going to go to the bathroom. You can keep watching the video,” she said.

“Okay.”

Lee Ji-Hye would always call me oppa to hide the fact that she was older than me, so even she had to have been surprised by what she had done. I wasn’t sure if she decided to go to the bathroom to cool her head down or to release her fury, but I decided to focus on the video in front of me.

The workers and the guards of the site were standing in front of each other. The workers were chanting while staring at the guards with grim looks. It seemed that they wouldn’t back down no matter what.

- We’re not servants!

- We’re not servants!

- We must demand our rights! Wake up, Mikhail! Wake up!

- Wake up! Wake up!

- There are rumors that the funds and support for our benefits are spent elsewhere.

The other zones are receiving basic benefits, but our zone isn't receiving any benefits! The site manager must be transparent and reveal how those funds are being used right now!

- Reveal them! Reveal them!

- Mikhail must be punished!

- Punished! Punished!

- You must listen to the voices of the workers right now!

- Wake up! Wake up!

- We're not servants!

- We're not servants!

'Shit, this is worse than I thought… '

Their teamwork was so great that I couldn't believe that this was their first time protesting. The angry workers were screaming at the top of their lungs, so naturally, no work was being done. The guards screamed at them to return to their stations, but they were soon overcome with surprise.

Unfortunately, these workers wouldn't go back to their stations. It had to have been a difficult decision to make, so they would definitely not back down so easily.

- Disband this illegal protest right now and return to your assigned locations.

- We won't go back!

- I'll say it again. Workers participating in the protest must return to their assigned locations. Any further protest will be considered as a violation of the Continental Protection Management Committee's rules, and we will force you to disperse.

‘Damn it… This has nothing to do with me, you bastard… Don’t use the Committee as an excuse, you bastard!’

- Hurry up and disperse them!

- We must not back down! We must seize our rights with our own hands!

- Make them disperse! Hurry!

- The site manager must come out right now and tell us what we have to know!

- You are doing an illegal protest without the permission of the Committee. Following the Continental Protection Law, we will disperse you by force. I'll warn you again. This is an illegal protest, so we will disperse you by force!

- We’re not allowed to contact the Committee, so how can we ask for permission? How is this an illegal protest? Stop the nonsense and bring the manager out here right now!

- Stand together! Stand together!

- What are the mages doing? Hurry up and start!

- Don’t back down no matter what! Let’s show them our will!

Who could have imagined that we would see this scene once again on this continent?

It wasn’t my first time seeing people spraying protestors with water to get them to disperse. The protestors were getting swept away by the water, and the guards used carriages to block the protestors from approaching the manager’s office.

The protestors clung tightly onto the carriages as the water beams struck them, while the guards holding shields at the front looked confused.

- Shoot! Shoot!

I had experienced many sieges after arriving here, but the siege in the video was pretty serious. Actually, this one was livelier than most sieges. If I could just sit back and watch, I would have watched and enjoyed it, but I obviously couldn't do that.

'What are you trying to pull by suppressing them like that?'

There was a reason behind the workers' protest, so this suppression wasn't really that great. The gates of hell would open immediately once a worker died, and it was ridiculous how these guards were trying to disperse the protestors using the name of the Committee and the Continental Protection Law.

The scene looked so dumb, and they made it look like it was all my fault for creating the Continental Protection Law.

The protesters were targeting Mikhail, but this incident would harm me indirectly.

Obviously, I was sure that dumb pig didn't cause this incident with that in mind. Even he thought that this was problematic, so he probably had the stupid thought of helping them by resolving the issue himself.

'I can't just sit still.'

There would be huge repercussions if this scene was leaked on Benigoa Net, and the workers of the other zones would definitely get affected as well.

"What are you going to do?" Lee Ji-Hye asked after returning from the bathroom.

"I have no choice. I have to fix this. I don't really think that this is that bad… Anyway, you must be frustrated," I answered.

"No, not really… It's not a total loss. It's something we can use right away, so it doesn't really matter, and I'm not the type to get mad about things like this," she said.

'But you got mad earlier.'

“This is actually better. We can use this chance to give you more power and influence… You can step up and show the people that you’re trying to fix the issues. It’s sad that things will get delayed, but think of it as taking a step back to move two steps forward.

”We should just fix the situation and put those guys in jail after compensating the workers. Afterward, we’ll assign a great manager to the site.

”It’ll also be a warning to the other sites, and it has also been a while since you’ve shown your face, so it’ll help increase your popularity. Nice, it’ll definitely work out,” she continued.

‘I think she’s still angry… ’

“I’ll get ready to head out right away. The quicker we get feedback, the better,” she added.

“Alright… let’s do that. Let me get dressed real quick…” I told her.

“I’ll tell them to stop suppressing the protesters right now. I’m not sure if they’ll listen to me, but… don’t you think Mikhail’s group will catch on? I’m sure they’re thinking that the chairman will soon arrive. Do we just leave them be or do something about them?

”There are only a few hours left on the countdown, so I’m just hoping that they won’t run away and make things even more troublesome,” she said.

“Where can they even run?” I asked.

“I’ll prepare the troops as well, just in case,” she added.

“Have you checked the public opinion?” I asked.

“Do you really think it’s going to be great? The majority of it is still about Mikhail… he has to take responsibility for his failure. Still, I think it’ll be fine since there are a lot of people protecting him.

”Anyway, let’s go for now. I requested the fourth and sixth for reinforcements… If we ride the griffon, we’ll probably arrive around the same time as them,” Lee Ji-Hye informed.

It was pretty far, but it wouldn't take us a long time to get there if we rode a griffon. The problem was that the entire army couldn't ride one griffon, but the bodyguards nearby could mobilize with us, so it wouldn't be much of a problem.

The furious Lee Ji-Hye got on a griffon.

We soared to the skies, and we soon arrived at the chaotic Zone Five.

"You take care of the protesters. Talk to them and try to calm them down as best as you can," I ordered her.

"All right. Are you going to take care of what's happening inside?" she asked.

"I should be the one to do it," I answered.

The guards were wary of the griffon army that fell from the sky, but they immediately guided the griffons to the landing pad after seeing the banners that the griffons were carrying. The protesters started cheering; they had to have felt that their grievances were about to be addressed.

"Yes…!"

"The chairman is here!"

"The chairman is here to listen to us!"

It was kind of cheesy, but I expected that kind of reaction from them.

CHAPTER 575
REACTIONARY (1)

"I-I'm sorry. I can't believe that… you came all the way here…" the guard captain apologized.

"There's no need for you to apologize. We'll take care of the protesters, so please stop the forced suppression order. Leave the minimum number of soldiers and order the rest to stand by," I ordered.

"Y-Yes, sir," he answered.

"Additionally, send the priests in right away and treat the injured. Get rid of the carriages that are stacked up like a wall. *Whoo*…" I added.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"It's okay. You don't have to keep apologizing. All you did was follow orders. You handled the situation according to the manual. Anyway, we'll have to see if you really have nothing to apologize for… More importantly, where's Mr. Mikhail?" I asked.

"We sent a message the moment you arrived. I'm sure he'll be here soon," he answered.

'This bastard.'

I walked down the landing pad amidst the cheers, and the guard captain immediately came to greet me. It was absurd how he kept on talking desperately, but I could understand his feelings. A protest happened, and his job was to suppress them.

The higher-ups had also ordered him to suppress them, so I was sure things had gotten pretty chaotic. I would have felt somewhat out of my mind as well if I were in his shoes.

Humans also tend to be worried about getting scolded or punished.

I would have to investigate to see how he was related to this incident, but personally, I didn't really think that he had any connection to Mikhail.

"I understand that a lot has happened here recently," I said.

"That's true," he answered.

"And the protest happened because of those," I added.

"I-I don't really know the details… I was just following orders," he stuttered.

"I hope that's really the case. Please take care of the order I gave you earlier," I told him.

"I will do my best, sir!" he yelled.

Honestly, the person I wanted to see was Mikhail—the traitor—not this guard captain.

'Why isn't that bastard coming out to see me?'

I wasn't sure what he was thinking because he was still not in front of me, even though I was sure that he already knew that I had arrived.

I looked far ahead and saw the protesters gathered in one place. They had to have decided to wait quietly because the higher-ups were about to start talking.

It was probably the result of Bark Sergei, Arkimo, and Yetni Koba telling them what was happening.

If I could, I would have already approached Park Deok-Gu and slapped the back of his head, but he was in the middle of the protesters, so it was difficult to approach him.

He would probably come to me first once I was done taking care of this.

Three minutes later, I saw a young woman.

I had never seen her before, but I already knew her name.

'Natalie… '

“It’s nice to meet you, sir. And… I’m really sorry for making you come all this way. I’m Mikhail’s wife, Natalie,” Natalie said.

“Well, there’s no need for introductions. More importantly… where is Mr. Mikhail?” I asked.

“Mikhail is preparing himself right now to meet you. He said that he didn’t expect you to come this quickly…” she replied.

“…”

“…”

“I’m looking forward to seeing what kind of excuse he’s going to give,” I commented.

“I have nothing to say,” she said.

“There’s really no need to make preparations, but let’s hear it. I’m curious… I’ll be disappointed if he doesn’t give me any excuses considering this mess. Anyway, tell me where he is,” I ordered.

“I’ll lead you there myself,” she said.

“No, there’s no need. Stay right there. I’ll cut you down if you come any closer,” said Park Lian, my trusty bodyguard.

‘She’s working hard.’

Mikhail and Natalie had zero combat skills, so Park Lian was basically overpowered here. I didn’t think that there was a need for us to go that far. However, she had to have thought that the minimum amount of wariness was necessary because of our goal.

I wanted to tell her that this wasn’t necessary, but this wasn’t so bad because it would protect me from any ambushes. It would be a shame and cliched if I told her that I was safe only to end up dying.

Obviously, I wasn’t planning on letting that cliche happen.

‘Safety is the best… ’

Park Lian definitely thought the same as me.

Natalie revealed a look of relief at Park Lian's signal to stay a few meters away from me.

Park Lian made the air feel strange, but our conversation remained unaffected.

I noticed a bodyguard quietly following Natalie, so…

'They think of her as a threat.'

They were ready to take action.

I nodded with satisfaction while Natalie looked stiff.

"You can lead the way," I told her.

"Yes, I-I'll lead you there," Natalie stuttered.

"I thought about meeting you once, and I finally got to meet you. It would've been better if I met you under better circumstances," I said.

"I can explain everything about what you already know and the things you're assuming," she said.

"You can? Not Mikhail? *Wow*… this is pretty amusing. Anyway, this is really surprising because I summoned him and told him to fix things, but the situation still turned out like this… Of course, it could have been inevitable, but if he had taken care of it properly, it wouldn't have gotten this far," I complained.

"…"

"I can't forgive him for embezzling the support funds, but what's more unforgivable is how incompetent you guys are," I added.

"That's…"

"Did you really think that we wouldn't discover anything if we were to search every outpost in the north? Everyone is hiding something, and the central government is aware of that as well. How can every human be innocent? The continent is under my

management, but I still can't squash every corruption out there.

"You guys took it too far, and it was handled really poorly. I'm sure you were busy hiding your tracks. How nice it would have been if you had used that power somewhere else. I also can't help but think that you let all this happen just to lure me out here," I continued.

"I think there's a misunderstanding here, Chairman Lee Ki-Young. Please listen to what we have to say first…"

"I never said I wouldn't listen… I came all the way here to listen… Miss Park Lian," I called out.

"Yes, sub guild—I mean, Chairman Lee Ki-Young?" Park Lian answered.

"Take the troops from Zone Four and Six. Tell them to subdue everyone in the building. I don't like it when it's too noisy, so you can do that after my departure," I ordered.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"And… pick two people to bring Mr. Mikhail to the meeting room. It seems that he's not going to come out soon, so it looks like we'll have to go and get him…" I added.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"Thanks."

"You don't need to thank me for everything, sir," she said.

'I wonder what he's trying to do… I'm really curious.'

I almost chuckled after seeing Natalie's pale face.

'This is why people shouldn't commit crimes… '

Those who had things to hide would always make that kind of face, and she had to have realized what was happening because cold sweat started rolling down her face.

'This woman's nature and unique habit are nice… '

And that was why I had no idea how she got caught up in this mess…

I continued walking through the office.

My Goddess' Hand Mirror was ringing, so I checked to see if it was from Lee Ji-Hye, but I ignored the call after seeing Jo Hye-Jin's name on the caller ID. We were provoking each other in our previous call, so I could already deduce what she would say to me.

Natalie and I soon arrived at the meeting room, and I saw a nervous Mikhail. It didn't take me that long to get here, so I thought we would arrive first, but I was wrong. His face was pale, and I couldn't help but recall the great memories we had made together.

'Damn it… We had fun.'

A friend had decided to abandon me…

"It's been a while, sir. I'm sorry for the trouble I caused. I'm ashamed," Mikhail said.

"That's what everyone said. Seems like I've been stuck in the central government for too long. Haven't I told you before, Mr. Mikhail? I'm feeling bitter because you've repaid my trust with this," I told him.

"I'll… go and prepare some tea…" Natalie offered.

"Please don't move," Park Lian ordered her.

"No, it's fine. You don't have to stop her, Miss Park Lian. I was actually wanting to drink something… Good timing," I told her.

Natalie exited the meeting room anxiously, and one of my bodyguards followed her.

Mikhail watched her nervously.

I turned to Mikhail, and our eyes met briefly, but I saw him quickly lowering his head.

"I've investigated many things, and it's not because I don't trust you. It's part of the procedure. It was really interesting. The support funds were being sent to the

union… I don't care whether you did that because you owe someone money or you wanted to get as much money as you can while you can, but you took a huge fucking chunk."

"…"

"You made me go through a lot of suffering. You were also great at embezzling money, and I really didn't expect that you were also capable of laundering so much money. I guess people can't be trusted after all.

"I don't think the words *integrity* and *innocence* will fit someone who has become a symbol of corruption like you," I said.

"…"

"I understand that you have nothing to say, but since I was told that you prepared something, I'd like to hear it. The result won't change, but I want to see you do your best…" I said.

"It's a misunderstanding," Mikhail said.

"Don't you have a reasonable excuse aside from that? If you don't, I'll start asking questions. Where did all the money go?" I asked.

"…"

"I know it all went to the union, but there were still a lot of questionable parts…" I said.

"…"

Mikhail remained silent.

Click!

The door opened, and Natalie returned with tea cups and snacks.

She served the tea cups with trembling hands.

A bodyguard had been following her around, so I couldn't help but think if she had

an opportunity to put something in the tea and the snacks, so I activated Mind's Eye and checked the food.

'Ha… Shit.'

"*Ah*, I think I'm starting to understand," I commented.

[Colorless and Odorless Poisonous Tea - Legendary Rank]

[A tea laced with Elder Arachne's poison. The poison cannot be distinguished by ordinary means.]

"You reactionary bastards," I cursed.

Boom!

The wall next to me abruptly exploded.

CHAPTER 576
REACTIONARY (2)

The wall next to me exploded, and I saw an assassin. It seemed that they had been waiting for the signal to assassinate me because they immediately appeared the moment I revealed what was going on.

'These bastards are troublesome… '

It was so absurd that I couldn't help but laugh. Yes, it was absurd because it seemed that I had been backstabbed.

'It feels kind of strange.'

I wasn't certain how the embezzled funds were being used, but I finally understood.

It felt like I had found the puzzle piece that perfectly fit the puzzle.

When Lee Ji-Hye said she felt like she would find something if she dug a little deeper, she was probably expecting to find something like this. If she were here, she would definitely get angry and say that this was what she was talking about.

I finally understood his behavior and lines, which were the opposite of his nature and unique habit. He never had any plans of fixing the issues because these reactionary bastards' plan was to make me come all the way here from the start.

'They succeeded.'

Lee Ji-Hye was right, they targeted the weakness of the system that we had established. We would have noticed if we had more time to focus on our surroundings, but there was no point in reflecting on it now.

My head was starting to hurt.

I wasn't really surprised about this turn of events, but it still put me in a bad mood.

'Mikhail, you bastard! I thought you were incompetent, but you were fucking competent.'

If it hadn't been for Park Deok-Gu, I wouldn't have come here, but…

'No, it's better this way.'

It was great that the incident broke out right now, and we would profit a lot if we managed to take down the troublesome bunch. If the reactionaries went wild after the Outer God's appearance, they would have been a much greater threat.

The Park, Ki, and Ri siblings were waiting outside.

If something happened, they would definitely come here, but I honestly didn't need them.

"I'll take you outside," Park Lian said.

"Let's go," I ordered.

A powerful protection spell surrounded me, and my cute bodyguards immediately gathered in close formation to prepare for battle.

As expected, a group wielding weapons ran in through the hole in the wall, and they fought the bodyguards. There were voices everywhere, so I was having a hard time differentiating who was saying what.

"Die!"

"Die!"

"Protect Miss Natalie and Mr. Mikhail."

"We've secured their safety."

'All right, you bastards. So it was them, you reactionary bastards were hiding.'

I expected to receive another surprise gift, but I smiled after seeing a familiar face.

I also saw people collapse while bleeding. I thought my bodyguards were pretty

ruthless, but they had to do this because they would get scolded by the lovely regressor, who cared a lot about my safety, especially after the kidnapping incident.

Park Lian and the bodyguards were spread out.

Their average age wasn't that high, but they were skilled enough that if they went out into the continent, they would easily make a name for themselves. Park Lian was strong enough to become a party member of the Blue Guild's expedition parties.

These reactionaries were just a few puppies in a den of tigers.

The protection spell was still active, but my bodyguards still surrounded me the moment I stood up and started walking.

Park Lian split her large sword into two and displayed the sword art that she had learned from Kim Hyun-Sung, while the others did their best in the areas they specialized in.

'Kang Eun-Hye is pretty strong as well.'

I frowned a bit at the gory scenes, but not a single blood landed on the protection spell around me.

'I knew it, but… '

"It's not bad."

It wasn't bad to keep them by my side. The way they moved around me like flowing water made me acknowledge their training.

Of course, I was supporting them as well. I would snap my fingers to create a massive dragon claw that would either kill those bastards or create a path for us to move.

"Don't let them leave! We can't let them leave!"

"Kill them! This is a fight for the future of the continent. We can't let them leave no matter what!"

"Stop them! Stop them!"

'A fight for the future of the continent, my ass… Where did all of these guys come from?'

"I'm sorry… Sub Guild Master," Park Lian apologized.

"No need to apologize. I wasn't expecting this either. How long do you think it'll take until we reach outside?" I asked.

"We'll… open up a path as fast as possible," she answered.

"Okay."

"You dirty bastard! You're nothing but cancer to the continent! This will be your grave. We won't forgive you."

'Talking bullshit again… '

I would love to curse at them, but I had to take care of my image because they would use that to their advantage. Still, I wouldn't shy from taking out my anger to provoke them since I was human as well.

"You're making me feel like the villain here. The villains have already become clear. You can stop pretending to fight for your ideals and acting like you're noble, my dear reactionaries of the Republic!

"I can't believe that you're repaying my mercy and forgiveness like this. Who could have imagined that this would happen? Well, it doesn't really match, but the proverb about how one shouldn't bite the hand that has been feeding them was probably created for something like this."

"S-Shut up! You bastard!"

"Generosity is one of my weaknesses, and I'd like to applaud you all for being tenacious. However, why did you even come back here? I have an idea why, but I really couldn't do anything about his death," I said.

"Don't talk about the commander with those dirty lips of yours! You dirty bastard!"

"I gave all of you a chance because I knew that you were brainwashed by that demon summoner. I'll say it again. The real evil… the real demon… Think about who it is. You people still have a chance, unlike Jin Cheong," I continued.

“How dare you…!”

I wasn’t sure who this man was, but he continued responding to every word that I was saying. It was great that he was getting worked up at the slightest provocation, but the others were getting aggressive as well.

‘They all share the same feeling.’

“For the commander! For the peace and safety of the continent. Kill that tyrant!”

“You must get—”

Booooooooom!

An explosion interrupted Park Lian.

‘Ha… these crazy bastards.’

A suicide squad was charging in while holding explosive catalysts in their hands.

“Cast the protection spells! The sub guild master must not get injured!”

‘She’s right.’

It wasn’t because I disliked pain, but it was impossible to hurt me.

‘You’ll be in big trouble, you punks… ’

I couldn’t help but feel anxious. I didn’t expect to see people willing to throw their lives away without thinking about the safety of their comrades,

‘Shit, isn’t this really dangerous?’

I bit my lips, and I felt cold sweat rolling down my face.

Booooooooooom!

“Please take care of the rest, my comrades in the organization, please remember me!”

The powerful protection spell around us was starting to get warped. To make things worse, the dust and the smoke made it hard for me to see clearly. I was fine, but my bodyguards were starting to get disoriented.

“No need to be surprised. They can’t reach us yet. Let’s continue. I think it’s best if we head up,” I suggested.

“As you wish, sir. We’ll take the sub guild master and head up,” Park Lian ordered.

I cast alchemy spells and even hurled a Dragon Breath Potion, but those bastards were still alive. The protection spell started trembling, so I decided to summon a dragon claw and a dragon tail to protect us.

I wasn’t sure if they were enough, but it would at least buy the Park-Ki-Ri siblings time to get to us. Actually…

‘We can also go outside and wait for help there.’

There was a chance that the people outside couldn’t see what was going on here.

‘Do I really have to go this far? Those bastards… Actually, why does it feel like the enemy troops aren’t decreasing?’

Park Lian looked a bit confused as well. Soon, I heard a familiar voice.

“It’s a high-ranking Undead.”

‘…’

It seemed that they had truly thrown all caution to the wind. Goosebumps broke out all over me the moment I realized that they were willing to raise their deceased comrades as members of the Undead.

I wanted to compliment them for their resolve, but my surprise was greater than my awe because I didn’t expect them to have so many cards up their sleeves.

‘It seems that they’ve been preparing for quite a while now… ’

At this point, it was clear that words wouldn’t be enough to convince them. I saw malice in their eyes, and they looked like they would really kill me no matter what.

“They even have dirty black mages… I thought I’d already gotten rid of all the black mages on the Republican side. I had no idea that such a vicious group was hiding in the darkness. Is this how you deal with problems? Have you really decided to walk on the path of evil as well like…

“…”

“Like that fallen commander of yours?” I continued.

“The commander isn’t a demon summoner, you dirty bastard!”

“Don’t listen to his words! Don’t get worked up! Just proceed with the plan.”

“If the man who turned his subordinates into members of the Undead and used them as meat shields isn’t considered a demon summoner, then who is the demon summoner?

“Look at yourselves. You’re not all that different. You must not walk down the same path. Don’t become… like that ruthless and evil man! Open your eyes!” I shouted.

I made sure to look like I was jeering at them, and as expected, they immediately reacted.

“D-Don’t talk about the commander with those dirty lips of yours…!”

“Calm down! It’s a trap! A trap! Don’t fall for his provocation… May Queen! Shit! Stay in position! Don’t move!”

‘It only affected one of them.’

Someone rushed toward me amidst the dust and smoke. It was a girl with bloodshot eyes, and she was wielding a longsword as she made a beeline for me. Park Lian stood in front of her.

She swung her sword at Park Lian, but the latter easily parried her attack and pierced her neck.

Blood spurted out of her neck, and there was one less powerful enemy.

‘This is great… ’

I smiled, but the girl pulled the sword out of her neck and charged at me once more.

'Shit, what's going on?'

She wasn't an Undead. Her red eyes and exotic skin made her look devilish. I was in danger, but I still checked her condition with Mind's Eye.

'You dirty demon contractors… '

"You even sold your soul…" I muttered.

CHAPTER 577
DEMON CONTRACTORS (1)

'I'm sure they established a contract with a demon.'

I wasn't expecting a reply, but she replied to me.

It was a scary sight to see her glaring at me with her bloodied face.

"Yeah, we sold our souls just to kill you."

"…"

"Our lives, souls, and even our pride, we sold it all. Just to kill you."

I could hear her teeth rattle as she gnashed her teeth.

"How come you still haven't realized that the light will always win? Your actions will only sully Commander Jin Cheong's name. Don't you want to clear his name?" I asked.

"The commander will understand, and don't utter his name with those dirty lips of yours…"

"Commander Jin Cheong was a demon summoner, but more importantly, he was a prideful man. I'm sure you already know—no, you probably won't understand," I told them.

"Don't speak the commander's name with those dirty lips of yours!"

"Why does it matter whose name I say?" I asked.

"You dirty tyrannical bastard!"

'I was actually worried about how I was going to take care of the aftermath, but I'm glad that they revealed their identities.'

“Dieeeeee!”

A few bodyguards stabbed a charging man, but he didn’t really react. He was actually looking straight at me while banging on a bodyguard’s shield. It was to the point that I was curious as to which demon he got into a contract with.

‘Could it be a demon from the top legions?’

The demon definitely wasn’t a part of Belial’s legion because these bastards weren’t giving off the unique energy of the demons from Belial’s legion. However, these bastards seemed to have transcended death, so…

‘They didn’t contract a demon stronger than Belial, right?’

I couldn’t really tell which demon they got into a contract with, but it had to have been a reasonable choice in their eyes. Without a contract with a demon, they wouldn’t be able to make a difference. They probably thought that they had to use a unique way to make up for the difference in our power, and they eventually made that decision.

Their decision kind of surprised me, but it was probably because they couldn’t find any other method, and there was nothing better than establishing a contract with a demon when it came to immediately receiving a massive amount of power.

I was sure that their plan was to kill me in this government building, and they probably thought that there was no need for the denizens of the continent to know what was going on here…

The denizens didn’t really have to know because they would die even if their plan succeeded. I was sure that they had long abandoned their reputation as well.

It seems that she wasn’t lying when she said that they sold everything just to kill me. Demon contracts come with a price, and it was the same for the summoning. My case was kind of special, so others would obviously not have the same experience as me.

It was impossible for us to summon a powerful Demon Lord without Jung Ha-Yan, so these bastards had to have sacrificed something during the summoning ceremony.

‘I don’t know the identity of the demon behind them, but I’m sure these bastards knew what they were signing up for.’

In exchange for an undying fleshly body and power beyond most high-ranking adventurers, they sacrificed their souls and lives.

'I'm sure not everyone in their organization got into a contract… '

I was sure these people were executives, or perhaps some of them were ordinary organization members strong enough to withstand this kind of power.

'This is giving me a headache… '

I pretended like I wasn't being affected, but I was anxious inside.

I thought they were just puppies, but they ended up being wolves—no, tigers.

I wasn't sure if my powers alone were enough for me to get out of this place safely.

Park Lian and my bodyguards were skilled, but they had their limits.

The always nonchalant Park Lian even looked worried that she would fail to fulfill her duty. She had to have thought that fighting them in a long, drawn-out battle was impossible because she kept moving while guiding me and the bodyguards.

Unfortunately, she couldn't really do anything about their injuries.

The shield that I thought was going to last long was starting to crumble because of the suicide squad. In addition, it seemed like the enemies were guiding us somewhere rather than Park Lian guiding us to safety.

"I think they're trying to corner us," Park Lian said.

"I've been getting that feeling as well, but… I don't see any other options. I think it's best to buy as much time as possible…" I said.

"I'm sorry. *Um*… Sub Guild Master," she called out.

"Yes?"

"They're cornering us, so how about you…"

"No, there's no need to do that. I'm not worried about dying because of the traps

here. No one will die here. I have insurance, but it's dangerous. However, it's still insurance, so don't think or say things like that. As I mentioned earlier, let's buy some time while moving. How are your injuries and stamina?" I asked.

"We're not in the greatest condition," she replied.

"I'm glad you're honest," I commented.

I tossed a Light Bomb Potion, and a bright light pervaded the air above us. The dazzling light momentarily silenced the surroundings, and it also vanquished the undead blocking our path.

'It's blinding.'

The light filled the hallway, and I was happy to see the bodyguards recover upon being struck by the light. I was hoping that it would injure the demon contractors, but a pitch-black energy covered them, rendering the light somewhat ineffective against them.

'They must be a high-ranking demon.'

The softliners had no reason to target me, so the demon had to be a hardliner.

I thought we would have time to relax, but other reactionaries showed up from out of nowhere. I thought they would cower, but I was mistaken. It seemed that they were aware that there was a limit to how many Light Bomb Potions I could use daily.

Their eyes were filled with confidence, so it seemed that they were thinking that I had used a Light Bomb Potion sooner than they thought.

'Did I use it too early?'

However, it was better to use it than save it until it was too late.

'This is bad.'

I felt like things were going exactly as these bastards wanted, and the demon contractors—whom I considered the executives of their organization—were definitely wary of the Light Bomb Potion.

I was convinced that they were making me exhaust the daily usage limit of my Light Bomb Potions until I no longer had a weapon to use against them.

"They're trying to make me use all of my potions," I mumbled.

"Did you say something…" Park Lian asked.

"It's nothing. Have you tried contacting the people outside?" I asked.

"I can't reach them," she answered.

"Looks like they're using the same jammer that the demon summoner used during the war," I told her.

"I'm trying to find holes in the jammer, but…"

'We're too deep. Ah, this is frustrating… '

"…"

"Keep pushing them! Drain their stamina as much as possible!"

"Reinforcement! Reinforcement!"

"Block—*Aaaah!*"

"You dirty scum! You piece of shit! Cancer of the continent!"

"Don't back down no matter what. Don't be scared! Think about the commander! Think about the commander who died screaming by himself."

"The organization will die here today, but we won't die alone. We'll bring that tyrant down with us. Move!"

"You guys sure talk a lot for traitors who got into a contract with a demon. Who's right and who's wrong? Which side is the light, and which side is the darkness? Looks like you can't even tell which is right or wrong anymore. You've gone mad, you demon contractors," I said.

'They're not really reacting.'

The chief executives reacted more coldly.

'This is bad… '

We encountered another wall. Time went on, and I had no choice but to use another Light Bomb Potion.

'Maybe I shouldn't have used it earlier. Ha… '

Whooooooooosh!

The light pervaded the air once again. The effect was immediate, but the empty room was quickly filled with members of the undead and humans. They were still cornering us, but we couldn't really fight back.

I still had the Doom Ki-Young card and one more Light Bomb Potion, but we were outnumbered. We couldn't quite beat the enemy troops as well.

"A bit more!"

"Push them a bit more! A little bit more!"

We were running like crazy, but we couldn't take the path these bastards wanted us to take.

It was unfortunate, but we weren't familiar with the layout of this building, and there were too many of them. We were getting cornered, but we had no choice but to enter the tiger's den. We soon arrived at a location where these guys wanted us to go.

'Shit… '

The demon contractors surrounded us in a large room. They wore capes as if they were teenagers in their rebellious phase, and it was a ridiculous sight overall.

Every reactionary bastard was here…

'…Aside from Mikhail and Natalie.'

"Finally…"

My bodyguards moved closer to me, and I could hear them gulping in fear.

Meanwhile, I thought that the demon contractors would immediately attack us, but they spoke as if they wanted to savor their victory.

“You’re finally here, you dirty traitor.”

“You must’ve not seen the light that exploded just now. Calling me a traitor is kind of breaking my heart… I’m a hand-picked prophet of the goddess.

”Did you not see the bright light with your own eyes? You guys are the traitors, not me. Your words and actions don’t match as well,” I said.

“I’m not sure how you can use the light, but everyone here knows that you’re a shitty traitor.”

“That must be why you got into a contract with a demon.” I pointed out.

“It was a necessary evil for the greater good. We borrowed power from them to kill you. That’s all.”

“Every criminal and evil being all have their own story, but did you know? No matter how sad their story is, criminals are criminals at the end of the day.

”It was the same for Commander Jin Cheong. He was a war criminal who paid for the crimes he had committed,” I explained.

“You dirty traitor! Do you really think that you have the right to say—”

“Isn’t it pretty obvious? Light and dark, righteousness and evil. Even if I look at you guys from a kilometer away, you still won’t look normal in my eyes. Your eyes are red, and your bodies are twisted while covered in pitch-black darkness.

”Who would think that you guys are an organization made for the continent’s sake? It’s not too late to repent because no matter what you do, you won’t be able to kill me,” I told them.

“Don’t make me laugh! You think we don’t know how evil that heart of yours is? You’re the real demon. You’re the real demon for using that filthy tongue of yours to deceive the people. You’re wearing the mask of light, but do you really think that we

don’t know that dirty plan of yours?

”The denizens of the continent are not aware, but we… we understand it too well. This continent isn’t your stage, and the denizens of this continent aren’t your chess pieces.”

“I don’t understand what you’re talking about, but… I did not accept my position for the sake of ruling the continent. I don’t know why you can’t see that I’m trying to protect the continent,” I said.

“You piece of shit! We’ll cut out that tongue of yours so that you can no longer talk.”

“As the self-proclaimed protector of the continent, I can no longer stand idly by and let a bunch of demon contractors run amok. *Ah…* Great Benigoa! Please forgive me for my decision,” I said.

‘I have no choice… ’

I revealed a determined look and stared at the demon contractors. The expressions of the demon contractors changed, and they looked at me while biting their lips. They were thinking that they were right and that they were righteous.

“Sub Guild Master… that’s…”

“I know. Three hours,” I said.

[You have activated the Semi-Mythic skill: Job Change.]

[Alchemist of Light will be replaced by your subclass.]

[Dark Plaguelord has now become your main class.]

Words were unnecessary.

“Graveyard of Bones.”

It started raining bones.

CHAPTER 578
DEMON CONTRACTORS (2)

"M-Move!"

Craaaaaack! Craaaaaaaaaaack!

It started raining bones, and sharp bones also randomly emerged from out of nowhere.

Quite a few indescribable ghastly thorns scraped the wall and moved to pierce everything it touched. Anyone would agree that this was a pretty big deal.

The frustrated demon contractors scattered, but one of them couldn't escape and was caught in the thorns.

"*Cough… cough…*"

He was coughing up blood, but he was still alive. I couldn't help but frown at the sight. However, it seemed like he couldn't move anymore. How could he live when holes as big as drum containers were all over him? I couldn't help but be in awe of his tenacity.

'I don't think I can use common plagues… Are they still humans?'

I started channeling a spell while thinking that a powerful enough plague could melt their bodies. I could only use Doom Ki-Young up to a maximum of three hours a day, but Doom Ki-Young was strong, so I had to use him.

Of course, this didn't mean that Doom Ki-Young was suffering from zero penalties.

'Is pure holy power the only thing that can truly kill them?'

I figured that was the reason they were wary of the Light Bomb Potion. These guys couldn't be killed through ordinary means. It seemed that they could still move, even if they lost their heads.

'In other words, I can only incapacitate them.'

However, it was easier said than done.

'There are about forty of them…

I didn't include the small fries who had forced me to use the Light Bomb Potions earlier, as well as the ones who failed to enter this room.

It seemed that about forty people immediately gained power after establishing a contract with a demon. Wait, no, about fifty people. Those fifty people were definitely as strong as adventurers with Legendary-ranked classes.

'Three of them are stronger than most of them.'

Those were probably the leaders.

'I don't have enough power.'

I could only use one Light Bomb Potion. My bodyguards were high-ranking soldiers of the continent, but our opponents were undying monsters. It was impossible to guarantee anything against such opponents.

The biggest issue was the numbers. After taking into account those outside and the fact that they would become high-ranking members of the Undead upon dying meant that we would most certainly get exhausted before them.

'This is a mess.'

The right thing to do here was to escape. The battle entered a lull because of the Graveyard of Bones, and I was sure they were still studying their newfound powers just like me because they weren't really doing anything aside from biting their lips.

"You finally showed your true colors, you dirty traitor!"

"Shut up, you demon contractors! Our sub guild master is different from you bastards who willingly chose to get into a contract with a demon!"

"We're not strong enough… I'm sorry, Sub Guild Master."

'I feel like they're defending me a bit too passionately… '

Park Lian and my bodyguards were already aware of Doom Ki-Young and the penalty that I would suffer the moment I used Doom Ki-Young. It seemed that…

'They're thinking that it's their fault I changed into this form.'

It was kind of surprising, but I understood their feelings.

We got cornered, so if we buy time using ordinary means, one of them would definitely get hurt.

I didn't change classes with a specific goal in mind, but I thought that showing some sort of action wouldn't hurt. I stumbled while lightly grabbing the mask on my face, and Park Lian stared at me worriedly.

"S-Sub guild master!"

"I'm fine. I just have a slight headache," I said.

"But…"

"Let's only think about getting out of here. There's no need to think about anything else. We will get out of here," I ordered.

"I'll protect you with my life," she said.

'I said there's no need for you to do that.'

However, I liked that determination of hers, and I liked how she stared at me with tears welling up in her eyes. I thought that she wasn't the type to show her emotions, but she was more sentimental than I thought. If she reacted this much just with this simple transformation, then during the Doom Ki-Young incident in her past life…

'She probably cried her eyes out… '

It wasn't just her. The other bodyguards thought the same.

'It's a good thing that I've been taking care of my image.'

One of them even kept on saying useless things, and it was a surprise to see them talk so much because they weren't really the type to ramble on.

'What's her name again? Kang Eun-Hye?'

She was born on this continent, just like Kim Ye-Ri, and she lost her parents during the war with the Republic. She was eventually chosen as one of my bodyguards, and she was also the leader of the Blue Guild's youth program.

In a nutshell, she thought of Kim Hyun-Sung and me as her parents, and that was why she had been following us. If it hadn't been for the Blue Guild, she would have been sold off to a slave market somewhere.

She was aware of that, so she was extremely loyal. Her loyalty secured her position among my bodyguards, but she had never really been the talkative type, so I was surprised to see her talk so much.

"You guys are being tricked as well. Wake up and look at him closely. Open your eyes and look at him. Tell me if that's really someone you want to protect."

"Shut up, you dirty reactionary bastards!" Kang Eun-Hye shouted.

"You've been brainwashed. You're nothing more than pawns he can easily control."

"You guys are the ones who have been brainwashed by the demon summoner, you reactionary bastards! Mr. Lee Ki-Young is the savior of the continent, and he's a great man who will lead us to a new era.

"He's my benefactor, and he accepted people like me who had nowhere to go. The likes of you cannot compare to him! He's torturing himself right now to protect the continent, so how can you stomach saying such words?! You guys should open your eyes! You reactionary scums! I'll kill you all! I'll kill you all!" she roared.

"…"

"I'm sorry, w-w-we're not strong enough. I apologize, Sub Guild Master…" she stuttered.

The average age of my bodyguards was low, so it was easy to sway them with something like this. I started to feel guilty, which made me fidget.

“This is your last warning, pitiful fools! If you put down your weapons and leave, we’ll at least let you guys live,” the demon contractors warned.

“Shut up! You maggots! We’ll die here together with our sub guild master!” she shouted.

‘I don’t plan on dying here. I really don’t.’

“Kill him! Bring me the head of that dirty traitor! For the safety of the continent and to avenge our commander! Our organization’s wish is about to be fulfilled!”

“Sub Guild Master!” Park Lian yelled.

“No need to be startled or agitated. Let’s think about getting out of this place while maintaining a close and tight formation. We can do it. Don’t overdo it by stepping out, and maintain formation even if an opportunity shows itself. They possess the cursed powers of demons, but they still haven’t gotten used to that power,” I explained.

“Okay.”

“I trust you all,” I added.

“…”

“…”

“Understood.”

“Protect the chairman!”

“Make sure the enemies don’t lay a finger on him! Remember our jobs!”

“Come at us, you demon contractors!”

“Die, you bastards.”

“Protect him! Protect him!”

“Destroy the shield! Unleash your powers! Reduce those bastards’ bones to ash!” a

demon contractor yelled.

Craaaaaaaack! Booooooooom!

'This is more difficult than I thought.'

Ominous spells flew toward us from all directions. The bones and shields could still withstand them, but there was a limit to how many spells they could take. I dispatched a plague ghost, and it embraced one of Jin Cheong's men, melting them in an instant.

The plague ghost was pretty scary because they were virtually impossible to spot, but I could see the archers moving carefully in response to the unseen ghosts. However, it was useless.

I summoned a large tentacle and used it to grab one of the demon contractors, but the tentacle was immediately chopped off, so it wasn't very effective. However, the plague hidden in the tentacle managed to enter the demon contractor's respiratory system.

'It'll take some time for those tentacles to go away… Damn it, I'm too weak compared to when Belial was here.'

I thought I had gotten pretty strong, but it seemed that I was mistaken.

We were outnumbered, so my bodyguards were slowly being pushed into a corner.

I couldn't help but keep looking at them out of worry.

I dispatched skeletons and tentacles to support them, and the bodyguards were also doing a great job at maintaining the overall balance of the formation, but…

'Ah, this is dangerous.'

We were truly in danger. Just like those cliches in movies, it would be nice if the Park-Ki-Ri siblings suddenly appeared, but cliches like that only happened in movies.

I unknowingly looked at the exit, and I was astonished to see a certain someone there.

"*Huh?*"

'The cliche became a reality?'

I saw Jo Hye-Jin standing there with her lance.

'Why are you here?'

I stared absentmindedly at her as she swung her lance in an indescribable way.

She even reminded me of one of the generals in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*.

She was surrounded by enemies, but she made space by swinging her lance before thrusting her lance into the hearts of the enemies.

Arrows and swords made a beeline for her, but she gracefully blocked them with what basically looked like a large stick.

She used her lance as a pole to dodge an enemy from behind by using it as if she were a pole dancer, and she displayed magnificent footwork to dodge the attacks from above.

'Park-Ki-Ri are only useful for labor protests and revolutions. They're not as quick as Kim Hyun-Sung or as strong as Cha Hee-Ra.'

Jo Hye-Jin displayed prowess that only a talented genius could show, and the way Jo Hye-Jin stared at me worriedly reminded me of a martial arts movie.

She jumped and landed in front of me.

She sounded strange as she asked, "Are you okay?"

"Why are you here… Miss Hye-Jin?" I questioned.

"I asked you first, Sub Guild Master. Are you really okay?" she asked again.

'Yeah… thanks for worrying about me. You're the only one I can count on, Hye-Jin.'

"*Whooo…* Yes… I-I'm fine," I replied.

“You don’t seem fine. Let’s… Let’s get out of here as fast as possible. Miss Park Lian,” she called out.

“Yes, Ma’am!” Park Lian replied.

“Prioritize the sub guild master’s safety. I’ll create a path,” she ordered.

“Understood.”

Thwack!

Jo Hye-Jin snatched a flying arrow from out of mid-air with one hand.

‘Noona… why are you so cool?’

I couldn’t help but be reminded of the missing Kim Hyun-Sung while staring at her.

‘You’re making my heart beat faster, Hye-Jin.’

CHAPTER 579
DEMON CONTRACTORS (3)

"Follow me," Jo Hye-Jin ordered.

'Yes, ma'am. I'll follow you until the end.'

I looked at Jo Hye-Jin with a satisfied smile. I couldn't help but question if I had ever looked at someone this warmly before.

'I really can't put my feelings into words.'

It felt like we had a mutual understanding. I wasn't sure why she was here, but it seemed that she instinctively realized that her friend was in danger. It was proof that she cared about me despite our bickering, and her sudden appearance felt like a refreshing breeze within this chaotic place.

'I think I should express my gratitude for this… '

We were close, but there was nothing better than expressing my gratitude with words.

I was about to say something, but Jo Hye-Jin spoke first, "*Um*… are you sure you're okay? You look like you're in a really bad mood… If… your headache becomes worse, you have to tell me."

I thought I had done enough to convey my feelings, but her words surprised me to the point that I honestly wanted to hit her.

"What do you mean I look like I'm in a bad mood?" I questioned.

"I mean… You look like… a demon… No, I'm sorry. I just got these indescribable goosebumps on my back… I'm probably just imagining it, but if you suspect something is wrong, we must take action right away," she explained.

'She sure is blunt.'

“All right, I’ll do that,” I told her.

“Actually, I think it’s best if you return to your original form right now. There’s a time limit, I know, but… that power will certainly eat away at your mind, Sub Guild Master,” she suggested.

“No, it’s fine. I can handle it for now. I’m kind of relieved because you're here, but I would like to get out of here with everyone,” I said.

“C-Chairman,” Park Lian stuttered.

“You don’t have to worry about us, sir,” the other bodyguard said.

“We’ll gladly lay down our lives for your safety, sir. Please consider our main role and cherish yourself, sir,” another said.

“Even if we have to lay down our lives…”

‘I’m telling you that you don’t have to do that… What’s wrong with these guys? You guys are very important to me… ’

“…”

“*Whoo*… The time limit is two and a half hours. I promise. If I don’t change back even after the time limit, I’m going to do something,” I informed.

“Okay, I’ll leave it up to you,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

Kim Hyun-Sung would be furious. I managed to reassure the guild members with some nonsense, but Kim Hyun-Sung was the type who would wake up from his sleep at the mention of Doom Ki-Young.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she secretly wanted me to stay in this form forever, but our lovely regressor was so sensitive to this form that it went beyond trauma. He actually developed a unique habit related to Doom Ki-Young.

Of course, if he were here, I wouldn’t have to transform into Doom Ki-Young.

Jo Hye-Jin was strong, but as a human, she had her limits.

Those reactionary bastards would likely lose their limbs in the blink of an eye if Kim Hyun-Sung were here.

Objectively speaking, Jo Hye-Jin wasn't strong enough to take on all those demon contractors by herself. I was sure that was the reason she decided to allow me to use Doom Ki-Young.

If I were by myself, we would have been outside long ago, but I wasn't the only one here.

'Wait, can she even handle the burden?''

I was convinced that she could because she was actually making an escape route for us right now, and she could also be considered one of the most powerful members of the Blue Guild.

Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan were just too powerful, so if we exclude them, Jo Hye-Jin would be the strongest member of the Blue Guild. I reckoned that even if one were to scour the entire continent, they wouldn't find someone as skilled as Jo Hye-Jin.

There was a reason why Kim Hyun-Sung decided to recruit her.

'Wow, she's really good at fighting. She's really talented.'

Jo Hye-Jin's movements weren't as precise as Kim Hyun-Sung's. Her movements were big, but they weren't flashy. I had no idea how she managed so many spells earlier, and now, I still couldn't understand how she was doing it.

The reactionary bastards had to have thought that it was useless to send projectile-type skills at Jo Hye-Jin because they resorted to hurling AoE skills and spells at us.

However, their AoE skills and spells weren't really that effective against us.

'We're strong enough to block those.'

We were having a hard time dealing with those undying reactionary bastards, but it wasn't that difficult to protect ourselves from AoE skills and spells.

A cacophony of noises filled the air, but our armor made out of skeletons remained

steadfast. I thought it would be difficult for us to escape, but things were progressing smoother than I thought.

Meanwhile, my plague ghosts were plaguing the battlefield.

'Hang in there, guys. Yes! You're doing great. Keep it up.'

I could see subtle changes in my bodyguards' movements.

'Looks like they're in for the long haul.'

However, it seemed that the enemies had decided to fight until the end.

"Be patient, we have the advantage. We'll claw our way out little by little by attacking the weakest parts first. Ignore the spearmen. Ignore the spearmen and aim for the rear.

"Vanguards will focus on blocking the spearmen and refrain from attacking them. Prioritize limiting their movements! Stack curses and debuffs. Keep them busy and attack the rear. Focus on the rear!" I ordered.

'Yeah, we have no choice but to play dirty.'

"Use purifying spells and only remove the curses on Miss Hye-Jin. You just need to remove the curses because we need to save as much holy power as possible…" I added.

"I-I'm sorry… Sub Guild Master," Park Lian apologized.

"You don't have to," I said.

'This is why Mind's Eye is useful.'

I could see what type of curses those reactionary bastards were placing on Jo Hye-Jin.

'The movement speed reduction curse has to be removed. I think we can leave the strength reduction curse alone for now… The immobilization curse has to be removed as well. All mental-type curses have to be removed. Wait, her mind is strong… I wonder if it's better to save holy power.'

If we were to skimp on holy power, we would be able to hold out for much longer.

'There's a bunch of spells targeting the rear, but I can block them. Park Lian can take care of the troops coming from the left, the guy in the corner casting a powerful spell can be interrupted using arrows and ranged attacks. I can take care of that as well.'

The bodyguards' extensive training was one of the reasons why the current situation was working out in our favor. They didn't question my orders. They followed my orders to the letter. They had entrusted their lives to me.

'This is the most reasonable way.'

It was difficult to analyze such a chaotic battlefield objectively, but Mind's Eye made it easier for me. Moments later, I started seeing results.

'About thirteen of the demon contractors are out… '

They lost thirteen people, so they only had thirty-seven people at the moment. However, we were still going strong without a single casualty. \

Perhaps it was because they still hadn't gotten used to their new-found power, but it was most likely because we were trained to handle a chaotic battlefield, unlike them.

In other words, we could win this battle by a landslide.

At this rate, we would definitely win.

'We just have to keep going… '

"Don't give up, my comrades! Don't give up, no matter what! We must make that dirty fraud suffer under our grudge!" a demon contractor shouted.

"Move! Let's move! It's fine if we die while casting magic, so keep firing! Don't stop! Don't take a break. Keep moving and suppress them!" another demon contractor shouted.

"Damn it. Why… why aren't our spells reaching them? Why… why?!" a demon contractor shouted, clearly frustrated.

"Even if we die, we'll take you down with us to hell," another said.

“The light of the continent is undying. The light will never die, no matter how many times you attempt to extinguish it,” I chimed in.

“You still dare to spout… bullshit… in that form… *Cough*.”

‘The tentacles are great.’

They were getting more and more anxious because their barrier was becoming thin, and the demon contractors were slowly losing their minds. They were at the point where they had to make a different choice, and as expected, they dispatched the high-ranking Undead.

‘This must be the limit of their power.’

Of course, I was sure that they only dispatched those high-ranking Undead to stall for time. I was right, the demon contractors were getting desperate because they started channeling a powerful spell.

‘This is going to be extremely dangerous… ’

Unfortunately for them, we didn’t have to interrupt them and face them head-on. I wasn’t sure if we would make it before they were done channeling, but it was a gamble worth trying.

The incapacitated thirteen contractors were channeling powerful spells to bombard us to death while we were running away.

“Let’s go. We can get out of here,” I said and pointed somewhere. “Go there.”

“Okay,” said Jo Hye-Jin. She immediately started making a path for us to take.

“Miss Park Lian, please support Miss Hye-Jin while she’s making a path. I want the mages to focus on protection spells that’ll allow us to survive the oncoming bombardment-type spells,” I ordered.

“All right, let’s get out! The chairman said that now is the time! Don’t stop! Keep running!” Park Lian ordered.

“Keep going! Keep going!” a demon contractor shouted.

"*Gaaaaaaaah!*"

'Idiots.'

"Shit! Stop them! Stop them right now!"

"We'll get caught in the explosion as well. It's too—"

"Shit! They're getting away! The dirty group of frauds are escaping! Stop them!"

Cruuuuumble. Booooooooooooom!!

"Run! Run! Run, Hye-Jin noona! Run! Nooooona! Run!" I shouted.

Craaaaaack! Booooooom!

'Protect! Protect! Protect!'

Craaaaack! Booooom! Booooooooom!

I didn't stop casting spells while I was running. My movement speed was slow, so Jo Hye-Jin was running while somewhat dragging me away. It was kind of embarrassing, but it was efficient.

The skeleton shields I made by casting my spells blocked the bombardment, and whenever my shields were destroyed, new shields would spring up to take the damage.

The protagonist's party barely made it out of the explosion. I remember mocking Hollywood movies that used this type of ridiculous cliche, but I was relieved that I was here.

We barely made it out of the explosion, and the sweet air of the outside world filled my nose. Before I could look around, I heard the demon contractors frantically shouting. Of course, they couldn't do anything other than shout.

"L-L-Look! Look at him! Denizens of the continent!

"This is the true form of Father Lee Ki-Young, the one you called the Incarnation of Goddess Benigoa and the Saint of Light. He got into a contract with a demon and

deceived the continent.

”Our organization discovered what he has done, and we have decided to put our lives on the line for the sake of the continent and for the sake of a society that is truly free, just, and fair!” a demon contractor shouted.

‘…’

“I know it’s hard to believe! However, we are not lying. This is the darkness hidden beyond the veneer of peace.

”Chairman Lee Ki-Young is a tyrant of the continent, and he’s a fraud. Yes, he’s a fraud! Look at him with your own two eyes. This masked appearance is his true appearance!” they continued shouting.

‘Yeah, that totally sounds legit… ’

Sir, you’re into your role a bit too much. Wake up, sir. Seriously.

These reactionary bastards had become nothing more and nothing less than demon contractors now that they had revealed themselves. Honestly, there was no need for me to step up and give an excuse. It was unfortunate that I couldn’t really change my job, but I trusted my lovely denizens.

‘My people will decide which side is evil.’

I could see the organization members hiding their dark energy, so I decided to show some blood, just in case.

CHAPTER 580
DEMON CONTRACTORS (4)

"*Cough.*"

"Chairman Lee Ki-Young."

"Sub Guild Master, are you okay?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"Yes, I-I'm fine," I replied.

I looked around and saw people staring at me in disbelief. However, the majority of them were confused. They were trying to figure out why there was an explosion, what was this organization, who were these people wearing large capes, and why Chairman Lee Ki-Young looked like *that*.

However, I was sure they would figure out their answer because these people had been cheering for me not that long ago.

Honestly, everything would be resolved the moment I activated Job Change to turn into Light Ki-Young, but there was no need for me to be hasty. I wouldn't be able to prevent people from talking about my current appearance anyway, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to choose a different method to go about addressing this.

I was also curious about how the denizens of the continent would react to my current appearance, and I wanted to test just how much faith they had in me.

'More importantly, were they really not aware of the fact that there was a battle inside the building?'

In other words, the noises and magic undulations from within the building had been completely blocked earlier. Mikhail had really done a great job. There was a great battle inside the building, but the other half of the building was still intact.

It was a massive explosion created by thirteen members of the suicide squad whose jobs were definitely Legendary, at the very least. If the building were built using

ordinary buildings, the entire building would have collapsed.

'Should I be happy or frustrated?'

I turned and saw the revolutionary siblings looking at me with pale faces.

They retreated, but I was sure they would join later after revealing their identities.

'This situation is basically over; those siblings are here after all.'

Even a child could deduce what would happen if the original party members of the current Blue Guild were to join the battle. No, before that…

'It's definitely over for those guys.'

I was sure the demon contractors wanted to carry out their plans as quietly as possible, but everyone on the continent was currently watching them. They hadn't even thought about failure. Such thoughts never crossed their minds because they were prepared to kill the light of the continent, even if they had to sacrifice their lives for it.

The fight that no one else had seen, the fight that no outsider had any idea what it was about, and the fight that they were prepared to lose their lives for as if they were protagonists of those old movies—it became nothing more than a comedy show.

The demon contractors had to have realized that they were at a disadvantage because some of them were frowning.

They said that their commander would definitely understand them, but I was sure that they were worried about dragging Jin Cheong's name into the mud once more.

As for the one who was shouting earlier, they were obviously just desperate.

It was a desperate plea asking the people to notice them and to realize that they were the ones on the side of justice. They were trying to show that the organization's cause was just and that it was fighting for the sake of the people.

Veins were popping out of their necks as they kept on shouting, so it seemed that they didn't sell their emotions to the demon. I was sure that they were determined to throw everything away, but a part of them wanted the people to be on their side.

'Come on, you can't be that greedy. you're supposed to give up the other after choosing one. Isn't that right?'

It seemed that they had no idea about the fact that only a chosen few could have their cake and eat it as well.

"Come here and take a look! The tyrant Lee Ki-Young is under the demons' control! You people have been deceived! The Lee Ki-Young that we know has always been just a role that he has been playing!

"His real goal is to control the continent, and he was willing to shed a lot of blood behind the scenes just to achieve his goals!"

'Yeah, keep talking shit.'

"The Nightmare of Laios and the Demon Summoner incident—the mastermind behind those two major incidents is Chairman Lee Ki-Young. He covered up his tracks and framed Jin Cheong of the Republic for it.

"During the battle with the Republic, he made undead creatures to convince you people that he is clean, and now, he is trying to use the Goddess' Hand Mirrors to bring the entire continent under his control!"

'Keep going.'

"Open your eyes! I won't ask you to fight with me, but I want at least one more person to realize that this dirty bastard is a fraud. He's a demon! Lee Ki-Young is the real demon!

"He's the enemy of the continent that the goddess has mentioned, and he's a threat to the continent. For justice! We're fighting for justice!"

'You can keep talking all you want, but they won't believe you.'

They had chosen the wrong path.

They could talk all they want, but it would be useless because the majority of the people here wouldn't even understand his explanation.

I had a lot I wanted to say, but I decided not to do so because the balance would be

ruined.

In the end, I chose *that* method.

“Run… *Cough*… Run! All of you must… run away from here!”

“*Huh?*”

“It’s… dangerous. *Cough*… It’s… dangerous!” I told them.

“What… What kind of bullshit are you spitting out?!” the demon contractor shouted.

“They’re demon contractors… they’ve already given up their humanity. Run away right now. Get out of here… Run far away from here… Everyone in Zone Five must hurry up and… leave!” I yelled.

“You… You!”

“*Cough! Cough!*”

“S-Sub Guild Master. Are you okay?!” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“Chairman Lee Ki-Young! Chairman Lee Ki-Young!” Park Lian shouted.

“Change your form right now, Sub Guild Master. Any longer, and you will be in danger. No matter how you look at it… you don’t look normal…” Jo Hye-Jin suggested.

“We’re okay, sir… We’re okay, so please release that cursed power,” Park Lian said.

“Sub Guild Master… it’s okay now, so please…” Jo Hye-Jin begged.

“No! Not until they’ve escaped! I still have some time!” I retorted.

My acting was so great that it even made Jo Hye-Jin worry. One had to fool their allies first to fool their enemies. It was a saying that had never failed me, and it made the emotional scene reach greater heights.

“Protect Chairman Lee Ki-Young right now! Right now!” Lee Ji-Hye shouted.

The confused guards of Zone Five mobilized and ran toward us with their spears.

“Chairman Lee Ki-Young! Chairman Lee Ki-Young!”

“Shit… You scummy demons… Please wait for me, Chairman Lee Ki-Young! I’ll come get you soon,” Park Lian said.

“Don’t come up here! Turn back and leave the site. It’s dangerous. Those people… *Cough*… They’re no longer human! They’ve made a contract with a demon…” I told them.

“Lee Ki-Young, you dirty fraud! Do you really think you have the right to say that in that form?!” the contractor questioned.

‘Of course I do.’

“I know… I must ask forgiveness from Goddess Benigoa, but everyone else here is more important… than my body. Y-you probably won’t understand. You people have sold your souls to a demon… you won’t understand me,” I stuttered.

“You’re being tricked! The real demon of the continent is him! It’s not us. Lee Ki-Young… he’s the real threat!” a demon contractor yelled with all his might.

However, he couldn’t convince the crowd. After all, the light that was trying to protect the denizens shone brighter than anything else.

I acted like I was catching my breath, and the way I reached out with my hand toward the members of the crowd was probably enough for me to be nominated for a Nobel Prize in Literature.

My methodical approach to acting allowed me to maintain the emotional scene.

‘I must protect them. I can’t let the continent fall into the hands of those demon contractors.’

It had been a while since I had that kind of resolve.

“*Haa, haa.* Even if I die here today… I won’t let them lay a finger on the people,” I said.

I thought that dialogue was a bit too much, but a sincere voice and gaze made a difference. Actions were more impactful than words, after all. I wasn’t injured, but I acted like I was injured. I also made sure that I looked like I was going to faint at any

moment after reaching my limits, physically and mentally.

“There’s no need to explain, Gaven. We just have to do our job. I wasn’t expecting them to believe us in the first place, anyway. I completely understand how you’re feeling, but we must complete the task we were given today. I’m sure our commander and our comrades who had sacrificed themselves want us to do that,” said a demon contractor.

“But… But… sir!” Gaven yelled.

“We’re the evil ones here, so I didn’t expect anyone to understand us. Everyone, prepare for battle! Lee Ki-Young is exhausted. He looks like he can’t even stand up anymore…”

‘I’m not exhausted at all, sir.’

“Listen carefully, my brothers, sisters, and comrades! Don’t fall for the enemy’s words and the crowd’s reaction! We will surely be remembered as the evil ones, but our will isn’t so weak that we’d get discouraged for not being welcomed with open arms sooner rather than later. Isn’t that right?” asked the man.

“Sir…”

“It doesn’t matter if your reasoning is personal revenge, but everyone knows that the demon wearing the mask of a god is a being that must die. Even if it’s only one person… even if only one person will remember our sacrifice and resolve, it’s good enough.

”Let’s fight for the continent, my comrades! For our grudge, anger, and the justice we’ve been seeking for a long time—we have to fight!” he continued.

“Yes, sir.”

“Understood… sir.”

“I’m sure there’s at least one person who recognizes our cause, sir.”

“When I first received the offer, I thought you were crazy, but honestly, I’m relieved to be standing here with you, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“I was a criminal with nowhere to go. It was on impulse that I joined the organization because I fell for your words about fighting for justice at least once, but in the end, it looks like I’ll be remembered as an evil person.

”However, I don’t resent you, sir. The time we spent was short, but the people in the organization I had spent some time with… I won’t forget them even in the afterlife… no matter what.”

“Then, let’s become the bad guys, sir. It fits us perfectly.”

“This place is going to be our graves. This is what happens when you meet the wrong guy.”

“Sir… We’ve always trusted and followed you. We will never regret the decision we’ve made. I’m sure we’ll be remembered, sir. I’m sure—”

‘You guys really think you can go to heaven? You demon contractors!’

“E-Everyone… thank you,” the leader stuttered.

‘Geez… they’re being too emotional… ’

I almost fell for it as well.

For some reason, the way they prepared for the final battle and cried as if they were warriors of justice looked kind of awkward.

It was annoying to see them believe that they were actually *just,* but I nodded upon seeing the demon contractors show their true colors. There were shocked screams, but I soon started hearing the crowd’s passionate cheers.

“Protect Chairman Lee Ki-Young! We must not give up on the continent’s hope!”

“Protect the light of the continent!”

“Chairman Lee Ki-Young! We believe you’ll overcome this!”

If I were using a spirit ball at the moment, I was sure that I would have already absorbed everyone’s power. I was staggering after reaching my limits, but the crowd’s cheer gave me the strength to stand up.

The light of the continent would never be extinguished.

CHAPTER 581
NOBLE SACRIFICE (1)

"You must survive, Rafael."

"Leader… [1]"

"I'm not looking down on you, and I'm definitely not blaming you, Rafael. This is my own decision, and it has nothing to do with you, Rafael. I'm… I'm scared. I'm scared, Rafel."

"Leader."

"I'm scared… that people who still remember our true selves will disappear. I'm scared… that they'll think of us as nothing more than dirty contractors who sold our souls to a demon.

"I'm scared… that no one will understand us. That's why you must survive. I want you to survive and watch our final moments. It's a difficult task, but I want you to carry it out."

"That's not true, sir. I don't think that way at all. It may not be the case for everyone, but I'm sure there's someone out there who understands us, remembers what happened here, and will honor us. I'm sure someone who understands the noble will of our organization will appear."

"No, we'll be remembered as the evil ones. Whether we succeed or fail, the world will see us as the bad guys and curse at us. That won't change. But Rafael, if there's even one person, that's enough.

"If at least one person remembers us… Yeah, it is meaningless, but it will be really meaningful to the organization members."

'But…"

'I want you to watch our final moments. Watch until the end, etch it into your heart,

and tell the people our story. We started this simply out of revenge, but still… I want you to remember and write down the names of those who fought for our home and for the justice of the continent

"I'll leave that to you…"

"I'm going to fight as well, sir. I can't just watch… I can't just watch as you and our comrades die, sir…"

"It's my last request. My last wish."

"…"

"Leader…"

I couldn't do anything other than watch the unfolding battle. I couldn't do anything other than watch our noble members fight. We started at different starting lines in life, and our starting lines weren't great, but the organization united us as one with a common goal.

No words could describe how noble they looked in my eyes, and no flowery words could describe the emotions that they had to be feeling right now.

I felt like I was cursed because all I could do was watch. My hands were shaking, and cold sweat was rolling down my face. I bit my lips because my emotions were being swayed, and I unknowingly started crying.

I wanted to look away every time a loud explosion occurred because I didn't have the confidence to watch the battle until the end. But… I had to open my eyes and carve everyone's final moments to the retina of my eye.

It was my last mission as a member of the organization.

"Don't retreat! Don't retreat! A bit more… just a bit more… If we work a bit harder, I'm sure we'll reach them. Think about what we had to go through! Move! Think about the reason we're here!"

'I should be there with them… '

The warrior, Gaven, was hot-tempered, but his heart was warmer than anyone else.

Even though she joined late, Luciela kept people together as the organization's mage.

Jean Valjean of the Republic was labeled as a criminal for stealing bread, but he was just trying to feed his struggling siblings.

Serviola was a priest who had been supporting us quietly from behind the scenes.

I could see that everyone was at their limits. Their bodies had crumbled, and they could no longer use their powers. I was sure they were in pain, even though they weren't expressing it.

Moving their legs, swinging their swords, taking care of other people, and even yelling were probably painful for them. Their faces were painted with excruciating pain, as if they were being burned alive, but they kept on moving.

Who could call them demon contractors after witnessing their zeal? Who could criticize them for being filthy when they were simply trying to fight back against absolute evil by sacrificing themselves? I was sure no one would deny that they were evil; those people would definitely acknowledge that they were evil.

In the end, those witnessing this battle would understand the organization. I was sure of it, and that was when I heard a voice beside me.

"You fucking bastards!"

"Because of those demon contractors…! Chairman Lee Ki-Young…! Chairman Lee Ki-Young—*Heuk!*"

"Sir, hang in there. Please hang in there!"

"Hang in there, Father Lee Ki-Young. Hang in there, please!"

"I'll start praying so that Father Lee Ki-Young can overcome this trial. Everyone, let's pray. Let's pray for Father Lee Ki-Young, who's resisting for the sake of worthless beings like us."

My hands were trembling. I could feel the ferocious hostility in the voices of those who were shouting.

“Those worthless demon contractors! The continent doesn’t belong to you! The light never loses—never!”

‘That’s not it. You shouldn’t be cheering for that fraud… ’

“Look at those nauseating bastards who sold their souls! I’m afraid they’re going to become nightmares in my dreams! I don’t know where those bitches had come from, but they’re corrupted!

”Those demon bastards are still causing us trouble, and that is exactly why Chairman Lee Ki-Young has been working hard on this construction. This is part of his wisdom. Those dirty demons actually destroyed part of the government building that we built!”

‘He’s not doing it for the continent. Our… our organization… is the one that’s genuinely fighting for the continent.’

“Hang in there, Jo Hye-Jin! Smash their heads!”

“Let’s pray. Please protect Father Lee Ki-Young, Miss Jo Hye-Jin! I beg you.”

“We can’t just stand around and watch. Those who can fight should pick up a weapon. We can’t just sit by and watch Chairman Lee Ki-Young be in pain any longer. We just can’t! How much longer are we going to hide behind him?!

”Everyone! Let’s prove right here that if we gather our strengths… we’ll become extremely powerful when united as one, even though we are weak!”

‘Your swords shouldn’t be pointing at the organization. It should be pointing at that scummy fraud.’

“You’re right! We’re weak, but we can fight. Even if we die here, let’s help the continent and Father Lee Ki-Young! I’ll fight! Let’s go! We have to do something about this!”

‘Don’t do that. Don’t… Don’t do that.’

“We’re on our way, Chairman Lee Ki-Young!”

“You’ll only get in the way if you go up there. Look at him right now…”

"…"

"He can't focus properly… because he's worried that we'll get hurt. The only thing we can do is watch from afar and pray. We're too weak to help him! If we go there and try to help him, we might end up giving those demon contractors an opportunity to escape. Let's… think about why Father Lee Ki-Young still can't let go of that corrupted power."

'Our leader isn't a demon contractor."

"S-So what should we do?"

"Pray. As always, the goddess is watching over Father Lee Ki-Young. Pray."

I saw my comrades fighting despite coughing up blood. This situation I was thinking about and what others were thinking about were completely different.

It was to the point that I was confused about which side was actually just.

No matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't understand how they could call the organization members scummy demons and cursed children while ferociously cursing at the organization members. They didn't know anything about our leader, the members of the organization, and the secret as well as the truth behind Father Lee Ki-Young.

'You guys know nothing.'

Was there really a need to risk our lives for people like them? Why were we trying to protect the continent? Why were we trying to protect these people?

"Why are we fighting…"

The organization members started dying, and every time they fell, the people cheered.

"Why… did we work so hard… for people like them…"

"Good job!"

"I had faith!"

“Get rid of all those dirty demon contractors!”

“Be careful!”

I wonder what the organization members were thinking while listening to the people’s curses…

‘Hang in there, sir.’

Could my voice reach him?

‘Don’t lose to that dirty fraud. Don’t lose no matter what… ’

“H-Hang in there…” I mumbled.

‘Don’t die.’

“Hang in there! Don’t die! I’m cheering for you! You can do it!”

I yelled in the middle of the crowd, but there was no way my voice would reach him.

“That bastard is getting up again. Those wicked demon contractors are getting up again.”

“Dirty bastards… How can they move when their hearts have been penetrated? They really are monsters…”

“Look at them coughing up dark red saliva. I’m afraid Father Lee Ki-Young is going to be exposed to that energy.”

“T-Those demon bastards are getting up again! The bastards who got killed are getting up!”

Did my voice really reach our leader? I wasn’t sure if it was because of my voice, but the members started moving once again. I could be imagining it. How would the members differentiate my voice from the crowd?

However, all I could do was yell at the top of my lungs and hope that my voice would reach them.

'A miracle... '

If God truly existed, I hoped for a miracle for their poor souls—a tiny miracle for those who had been abandoned by the world.

'I hope it reaches them.'

I wasn't asking for much.

'Please reach them.'

Give them the strength to move a bit more.

'Please reach!'

The power to resist the continent's absolute evil.

"H-Hang in there. Hang in there!" I shouted.

"Hang in there! Father Lee Ki-Young!"

"You can do it. *Kgh*… Y-You can do it. *Kgh*… You got this!" I yelled.

"You're doing great, Jo Hye-Jin! Keep going!"

"*Heuuuung…* You can do it. You… can do it," I mumbled.

"Let's pray. Let's all use our voices for Father Lee Ki-Young! For Chairman Lee Ki-Young!"

"*Heuuuuuung…* Get up. *Kgh*… Oh God… please… please give them a tiny miracle…!" I begged.

"Chairman Lee Ki-Young is up again. Let's cheer a bit more!"

"Hang in there…!" I yelled.

I saw our leader looking at me in the crowd. I couldn't see clearly because of the tears in my eyes, but I was sure that he was smiling. His face was definitely telling me that he was thankful that I was cheering for them, that he heard my voice, and that

everything was okay now.

'He heard me.'

"Thank you…" I mumbled.

'My voice reached him.'

"*Heuuuk…* Thank you…" I whispered.

I saw our leader getting up once again and wielding his sword.

The members held each other's hand and gave him their remaining power.

"Win! You must win… no matter what…" I muttered.

This was the finale of our long journey, so I stared wide-eyed without looking away.

I would watch them until the end.

"You must… win."

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1. Rafael's POV ☜

CHAPTER 582
NOBLE SACRIFICE (2)

It was weird, but I[1] felt like I had become the bad guy here.

'I don't like these bastards' gazes.'

I felt even more uncomfortable because they truly believed that they were the righteous ones here. I wasn't sure why, but they were probably thinking that their current behavior was how a righteous person would behave.

They were being ignored by the world and had been abandoned, but the fact that they were pressing forward with their beliefs in mind was beautiful.

Their close relationship and the way they trusted each other made me want to applaud them. Ultimately, it seemed like they wanted the crowd to see their righteousness and end this situation beautifully, but unfortunately, I wasn't planning on becoming a sacrifice for the sake of their cliche.

I could easily step back anytime I wanted, and more importantly…

'I won't lose.'

There was no way the light of the continent would disappear.

'I should try hard as well. This is what you call method acting. I still have a long way to go.'

Anyone could tell those demon contractors were dirty and disgusting, but their eyes were filled with passion. It felt like they were putting themselves at a disadvantage.

It was a shame, but even if they shouted at people asking them to look at them, it would be difficult for them to get the crowd on their side.

Doom Ki-Young's silver hair fluttered gently in the wind, and he was handsome as well, so there was a drastic difference in our appearances.

Disgusting saliva was rolling down their mouth, and the way they charged with red eyes made them look like descendants of a demon rather than warriors of justice.

To put it bluntly, they didn't look human at all.

The tiring battle continued, and I couldn't help but smile upon seeing the demon contractors collapse one by one. However, I made sure to look like I was struggling as well.

"H-Hang in there. You can do it!"

"Hang in there, Chairman Lee Ki-Young!"

"Don't give up. *Kgh…* D-Don't give up. *Kgh*… You got this!"

"Good job, Jo Hye-Jin! Good job!"

"Let's pray. Let's all use our voices for Father Lee Ki-Young! For Chairman Lee Ki-Young!"

"*Heuuuuuuung…* Get up. *Kgh*… Oh god… please… please give them a tiny miracle…"

"Chairman Lee Ki-Young is up again. Let's cheer a bit more!"

"Hang in there…!"

I was overjoyed upon hearing the people's cheers. If I could, I would have waved at them, but I didn't have the luxury to do such a thing because the demon contractors' formation had changed.

"Did you hear that?" asked their leader.

"Yes, sir."

"Let's hang in there," he said.

"Understood."

"I'm sure we'll succeed. Let's engrave it into our hearts once more the fact that we lived just for this day," he continued.

"*Ha, ha,* sir… I don't think I can take it anymore. Please… take your time coming to heaven," Serviola mumbled.

"Thank you for everything, Serviola," the leader said.

"It's not much, but I would like you to use my power," she requested.

"I'll carry it with me," he said.

"Please accept my power as well."

"I'll carry it with me."

"Sir… have I lived… a meaningful life?"

"Of course," he replied.

"Thank… you."

The intervals between their deaths were starting to get longer, and it seemed that they were trying to awaken their leader. Indeed, I could see their leader's prowess increasing through Mind's Eye.

He had reached his physical limits, but he was still getting stronger. I was sure he could feel overwhelming strength filling him up, and I was sure he was thinking that a tiny miracle had happened because the power would allow him to last even longer.

I was sure he believed that the so-called *tiny miracle* was born from faith, trust, camaraderie, and justice.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a *tiny miracle* because it was possible to become even stronger like that.

It was similar to what Park Deok-Gu had gone through. Park Deok-Gu's stats would grow whenever he was enlightened to something, and his stats would grow explosively whenever he was in life-or-death battles.

Actually, it was a common occurrence, and I had seen many articles describing how to do such a thing. However, these demon contractors were awakening their leader in a completely different way.

If awakening were as easy as creating an emotional scene, no one would die during expeditions. There were interesting theses about how one could awaken, and the general consensus was there were conditions that had to be fulfilled to awaken.

I agreed with that as well, so I recall scouting the writer of that thesis to the Blue Guild.

The most important condition was a prepared mind. A prepared mind was necessary to accommodate the explosive growth of the fleshly body upon awakening.

Of course, those demon contractors definitely weren't prepared for an awakening. I was sure they had no idea what it meant to have a prepared mind. After all, they had decided to establish a contract with a demon to become superhumans.

In other words, there was no way they would awaken if it hadn't been for a contract.

'But he's trying to awaken here? This is absurd.'

"Sub guild Master… that's…"

'Don't be startled by that, Hye-Jin.'

"*Cough*… he's probably… amplifying the demon's power," I said.

"What?"

"A demon uses negative energy. The negative energy of humans is their source of power. Fury at the world… revenge, and feelings of inferiority… I'm sure their leader is amplifying his… power," I explained.

'Yeah, I'm saying it loudly on purpose so that you'll hear me, you bastards. Yes, this isn't the righteous way to go about protecting the continent.'

"I pity them…" I muttered.

"I can't believe… someone like you would think that way…" she muttered.

'What did you say, Hye-Jin? I'm a pretty warm-hearted person.'

"I can't help it. I feel bad for them. They've been brainwashed by… Jin Cheong, the

demon summoner. Look at that ugly clump of emotions; they changed all because of that…" I explained.

"Chairman Lee Ki-Young, there's no need to feel sorry for people like them," Park Lian commented.

"It's more like I'm regretting it—*cough*! Miss Lian. If only I had met them sooner… I could have guided them down the right path. I could have prevented them from becoming beings filled with revenge, inferiority, and anger," I said.

"Sir…"

'You reactionary bastards. No need to glare at me like that because I'm speaking the truth. Do you really think that your leader has awakened because of your camaraderie? That is a bunch of bullshit. Do you really think that demon contractors like you obtained a new power because of a sense of duty? Don't be ridiculous. Clean out your ears and listen carefully because I'm saying this all for you guys.'

"Are you okay, sir?" Park Lian asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm… fine, Miss Lian," I replied.

There was light in this ruined site, so I started crying.

I was worried about Jo Hye-Jin finding out that my tears were crocodile tears, so I looked away. Fortunately, it was clear that she didn't have the luxury to nitpick. Her likeability level toward me had recently increased as well, which helped clear up any misunderstandings.

In other words, even if she did have the luxury to look at me, I was sure she would think that I was genuinely crying because I was sad about those demon contractors' plight.

After all, I had been in a similar situation as them.

The reactionary demon contractors reacted to my crocodile tears.

"You… wretched bastard… deserve death…"

'You're the wretched one. I'm not the only one crying crocodile tears here, you demon-

contracting bastards.'

"Look at him absorbing the powers of his comrades. He refuses to look at the tears of his comrades who share the same goal as him as he absorbs them… how… how did he become this way?" I questioned.

It was such a trashy remark during such an emotional scene.

Their leader started trembling. His eyes turned bloodshot, and the saliva coming out of his mouth got even stickier.

'Eww, look at how sticky that looks… '

"You wretched bastard… I'll kill you. No matter what… I'll kill you no matter what! I'll tear you to pieces. That is the only way I can assuage the soul of our commander and my late comrades' souls," he said.

"Think carefully about whether you should be assuaging their souls or your anger… *Cough…* You're under a demon's control. Jin Cheong and the demons… they're controlling you.

"I know that you detest this world, and I understand that you had no choice but to go down this dark path, but… it may not be too late. It's just a tinge, but I can see it. I can see innocence in your eyes," I explained.

"…"

"Close your eyes and ask yourself about your true feelings," I told him.

'Is what you want? Is this really what the continent wants? Is that why you got into a contract with a demon?'

"Look into yourself and see if you're truly not fooling yourself. *Cough*…" I added.

'I'm sure you don't think that way… I don't think you're that *righteous.'*

"Think… once again… what it is you really want," I mumbled.

'You just want to get revenge, you bastard. Perhaps it's an inferiority… It's none of my business, but I know one thing.'

"…"

'You're not an ally of justice, and the continent hasn't misunderstood you.'

"…"

'You're just a… hideous monster.'

I gave him a cheesy smile as tears as clear as morning dew rolled down my face.

The crowd couldn't see it, but I was sure he could. Of course, he could see it. I was provoking him right now, after all. I wanted to show him their true appearance while they were fighting for their so-called *justice*.

I was ridiculing them to show that this was all they would amount to.

Lee Ji-Hye once said that I was a walking totem of provocation, and I wasn't really sure if it was effective, but their leader lost all reason upon seeing my expression.

"You… out of all people… We haven't fallen so far that we have to hear that from you. I can't forgive any comments that insult the comrades of our organization. You fucking bastard."

"…"

"I'll kill you at least. I'll kill you again, again, and again. Even if I have to throw everything away, I'll kill you, you dirty fraud…" he added.

'That's right. That's who you are.'

"I won't give you an easy death. I'll cut off your arms and legs and throw you to the pigs so that you'll live with the animals. I'll cut off that cunning tongue of yours and burn those eyes that ridiculed our commander with eternal flames, you fraud! You're a demonic bastard who fooled the continent! I'll kill you… no matter what!" he shouted.

'That's a nice reaction.'

The only issue I could find was that his reaction was better than I thought because he was actually starting to become even stronger while absorbing his comrades' mana.

His appearance started changing as well. His skin peeled off, revealing reddish-purple flesh underneath. Bones also protruded out of his skin, and he grew larger. He was obviously transforming into a terrifying, grotesque monster.

Yes, grotesque. He looked so grotesque that I felt like vomiting at the sight of him.

In fact, I lost my appetite upon seeing his sticky saliva dripping from his lips.

It was clear that he had completely lost it. The demon had devoured him, and he had become an idiot—an empty shell. He had become a monster that only moved according to his instincts.

- Kill… I'll kill you. No matter what… I'll kill… revenge…

'I can't believe he changed like that. Actually, it doesn't matter. More importantly, how did he become so strong?'

I got curious about the identity of the demon who got into a contract with this guy.

Who were they that they could deliver this much power without a summoning circle?

'I need to think about this… '

He took a deep breath, and a massive ball of energy formed in his mouth.

Boom!

A beam of dark energy flew toward me.

I raised my hand and created a shield made out of skeletons a few meters away from me, but it shattered with a loud *crack*.

I was startled, and I was about to make another move.

However, the people who appeared in front of me forced me to stop moving.

"Don't worry. I'll become your shield, hyung-nim."

I definitely heard that line from somewhere.

“What can I say?”

Those familiar voices—they definitely belonged to Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo.

Park Deok-Gu lifted his shield and easily blocked the demon contractor’s beam of dark energy.

‘He grew. He really grew a lot. How did he do it?’

Park Deok-Gu reminded me of a giant shield.

“It’s really been a while, hyung-nim. I missed you,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Yeah, it’s been a while,” I said.

‘You pig.’

I couldn’t help but smile.

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1. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 583
NOBLE SACRIFICE (3)

My plan was to smack Park Deok-Gu the moment he appeared in front of me, but I didn't feel like smacking him anymore after seeing him.

His appearance didn't change that much; he still looked like the huge pig whose figure had long been carved in my mind. Actually, if I were to nitpick, I would say that he had grown physically larger.

I saw it in the video, but it became more evident now that he was standing in front of me.

'His body grew bigger. He grew horizontally and vertically… '

I hadn't said anything, but it seemed that he was still quick-witted.

"I feel like I've been growing taller recently. *Ah*, we can catch up later since we have more important things to take care of… I know it's an obvious question, but… are you okay?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm fine… for now," I answered.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have asked because there's no way you're okay… I think it's best if we wrap this up quickly and visit that place again. Anyway, I never imagined we'd reunite like this, but this dramatic union feels great for some reason…

"It's been a while, and I honestly don't know what to say… Honestly, I want to give you a big hug, but It's unfortunate. Anyway, I'm really relieved that I can help you right away like this," he explained.

'I feel the same way, man.'

"I think it's best if you step back. I'm just pretending like I'm fine. It's actually pretty difficult," he confessed.

The way he blocked the demon contractor's relentless attacks with his shield made him look cool.

'This pig even looks cool now.'

I couldn't really tell what was happening because that demonic bastard's energy was so powerful that it seemed to have become tangible and was now blocking my sight.

'I think he's between Legendary and Semi-Mythic. No… it has to be higher than that. He's probably a late-stage Semi-Mythic.'

He was a villain with power second to none based on the continent's standards. Park Deok-Gu was a specialist when it came to blocking attacks, but it wasn't strange that he was struggling.

'But I feel like it's not that troublesome for him… '

I could still remember how Park Deok-Gu had stalled for time by facing Donovan by himself during the 27th Legion incident. Of course, Donovan never really took this pig seriously.

He was playing with Park Deok-Gu rather than attacking him with the intent to kill.

Donovan and that villain's intentions were completely different. The villain attacked with the goal of killing me no matter what, but the fact that Park Deok-Gu could still block the villain's attack meant that this pig had truly become even stronger.

'Is it possible to grow this much within a year?'

He had been struggling to make a breakthrough into Legendary, and I figured that he had to have encountered an opportunity sometime over the year. Otherwise, he wouldn't have improved this much.

'No, an opportunity like that is too rare.'

At this point, it would be more convincing to say that he went out to look for an opportunity for himself, but…

'It doesn't really matter. As long as he has gotten stronger, it's fine… '

Ahn Ki-Mo seemed to have realized that he would lose the opportunity to show off if he didn't make a move soon, so he started casting buffs on Park Deok-Gu. He also used his holy power on the wounded.

His buffs had gotten a few tiers stronger than before, so it was clear that he had also profited from following Park Deok-Gu all this while over the past year.

At first, I got the feeling that he changed his growth path because he couldn't beat Elena and Sun Hee-Young when it came to pure holy power, but his true strength wasn't in his buffs.

His defense and attack were on the same level as top-tier vanguards, and as if he wanted to prove to me that he had changed, Ahn Ki-Mo charged at the villain alongside Jo Hye-Jin.

After releasing a ranged attack, the villain roared once again.

- Kill… I'll… kill…

Park Deok-Gu leaned on his shield to prepare for the next attack. The bodyguards' position became a bit awkward after Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo's appearance, but the bodyguards nodded at the enemy's behavior.

- I'll… kill you… matter what. I'll… kill you…

Hideous objects started falling off of the villain's grotesque body.

The hideous beings moved strangely, and they were covered in thick saliva. They struggled to maintain their humanoid forms. They were walking on two feet, but they were empty shells incapable of thought.

Their waists were bent, arms were outstretched, and there were some with strange tentacles or perhaps organs I couldn't quite describe.

The small fries ran toward the bodyguards while gasping for air, and the warriors of light regrouped to face them.

- You… I'll kill you…

"Protect him!"

- Forgive… I can't… the commander…

"Reorganize the formation. Make sure that they won't get to lay a finger on Chairman Lee Ki-Young!"

- No matter what… revenge…

Booooooooom! Craaaaaaaaack! Crackle! Fwooooooooosh!

A fierce battle ensued, but I wasn't nervous. I was so relaxed that I was thinking about how to end this *beautifully*. If this happened a year ago, I would have had to risk my life to survive this attack, but today, I actually didn't feel *that* threatened.

Park Deok-Gu was the main tank, Jo Hye-Jin was the main DPS, and Ahn Ki-Mo was both a healer and the off-tank. I was in the rear as the Dark Plaguelord, which meant that our formation was basically perfect.

It had been a while since we worked together, but our movements were as smooth as flowing water.

Park Deok-Gu was busy attracting the villain's aggro, while Jo Hye-Jin and Ahn Ki-Mo jumped onto the battlefield while taking a mental note of my location. My job was to make up for the insufficient firepower and to control the battlefield.

Every time I snapped my finger, my allies' attack patterns would change.

Trust was the most important factor when it came to conquering dungeons with a party, and the Blue Guild had zero issues when it came to trust.

A fixed attack pattern was dangerous against monsters because there were monsters capable of learning from their mistakes, and it was important to make sure that a party's attack patterns had variety against humans because humans could easily recognize patterns and take advantage of that knowledge to win.

I was gratified to see that they hadn't forgotten the lessons that they had learned in the past upon seeing how they kept switching up their attacks and positions according to my instructions. I was especially gratified when I realized that Park Deok-Gu had memorized the manual.

"Switch, switch!" I ordered.

“I know,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Next stage,” Ahn Ki-Mo suggested.

“Get ready, hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Got it.”

Time went on, and we were slowly but surely cornering the villain.

- I’ll kill… no matter what…

The villain was using his large frame to his advantage. He kept on swinging his arms and releasing his ominous spells, but that was all.

- A bloody revenge…

We couldn’t end it because we didn’t have the firepower to perform a decisive blow, but the battle was basically over. Of course, my mind was busy thinking about something.

‘Is it really okay to end it like this?’

I wasn’t trying to make a scene or anything…

‘I think I should do a background check… ’

Was there really a demon capable of doing something like this without going through the proper procedure of summoning? It was less likely, but perhaps someone from the other side had gotten involved.

Wouldn’t Mikhail and Natalie know the details of the organization? Otherwise, this bastard before us was the final boss. Many thoughts led to one question after the other, and it was kind of tough, but if we decided to capture them, I was sure we could…

‘Has he lost all reason?’

He looked like he had become nothing but an empty shell on the outside, but I had to take a closer look just to be sure.

Park Deok-Gu noticed my hesitation and said, “Hyung-nim.”

“…”

“This is a completely different case from yours, hyung-nim. They chose to become corrupt, so don’t let that affect you. Don’t you already know that?” he asked.

‘It’s not because of that… ’

“It’s not your fault, hyung-nim…” he added.

‘It’s really not because of that, man.’

“There’s no need to worry…”

‘I told you that’s not what I’m worried about.’

No matter how much I thought about it, I couldn’t help but worry. I grabbed my head and pretended to be struggling to buy some time. I saw them react, but it wasn’t that effective.

‘I think letting him live is the best thing to do.’

It would be a different story if we had no other choice but to kill him, but I decided that it wouldn’t be a bad idea to capture and interrogate him.

Meanwhile, the villain had to have gotten frustrated because he opened his mouth and spoke in a strange, inscrutable language.

However, the Blue Guild’s formation remained steadfast.

The only thing I had to worry about was his blood and sticky saliva on me. I wanted to wipe them off of me, but I decided not to do so because the entire scene would look more gruesome if I was covered in blood.

In addition, it wasn’t like they could hurt me. Of course, I was uncomfortable, but I could take it.

‘Yeah, keep it coming while you’re at it. Things will be more advantageous for us that way. I was actually worried because I haven’t shown a scene like this recently.’

He was working hard as if he were trying to satisfy my expectations.

'Mess me up even more, you bastard.'

The villain ran rampant.

I was about to officially get to work, but the atmosphere abruptly changed.

The small fries froze while Park Deok-Gu, Ahn Ki-Mo, and Jo Hye-Jin stared at me nervously.

I felt a massive undulation of magic behind me, and I started trembling unknowingly. I felt an unknown fear grip my heart, and goosebumps broke out all over me. To make things worse, the villain stared wide-eyed at the powerful being behind me.

- D-Demon…

'No, she's not a demon.'

- Demon… that's a demon…

'She's not a demon, you bastard… Shit… I understand that she looks *like a demon, but… she's not.'*

Just what exactly did she look like right now that a demon contractor was calling her a demon? I was afraid to look back, but I soon heard a familiar voice.

"Die."

A massive clump of magic struck the villain's head.

Booooooooooom!!!

CHAPTER 584
MEETING AFTER A LONG TIME AND (1)

'Uh… uh… '

Craaaaaaack! Booooooooom!!!

I didn't really care whether the villain would survive such an attack or not, but it would be too much to expect that it was still alive after taking such an attack. The atmosphere was tense, and the walls started trembling along with a rumbling sound.

The wind was so strong that I found it difficult to open my eyes, and the cheering crowd screamed as if they had witnessed a disaster and started running away. They knew that they would die if they got caught up in the spell that Jung Ha-Yan was channeling.

It wasn't the best description, but the crowd looked like wild animals running away to safety upon noticing that an earthquake was imminent.

Their reaction was so intense that they made it seem like Jung Ha-Yan was the villain.

'No… Shit… Don't collapse… Don't collapse. It'll stay up, right?'

However, I was more worried about Zone Five's walls—no, the entire outpost rather than the others and myself.

The villain attacked Jung Ha-Yan, but she easily blocked it.

The earth cracked, and Jung Ha-Yan's feet got buried as she continued channeling.

'Stop, damn it. Ha-Yan… stop… You'll destroy our wall—no, the entire outpost. This isn't the right way to go about this, goddamned it.'

I looked up and saw Jung Ha-Yan floating in the air with her hands outstretched above her, and she looked as if she was carrying the entire world as she bit her lips. Blood flowed out of her lips as she bit them, and she glared at the villain with

bloodshot eyes.

I finally understood why the leader of the demon contractors called Jung Ha-Yan a demon. It was all because she truly looked like a demon at the moment.

“Die… Die… I’ll kill you. I’ll kill you!”

She was obviously not in her right mind.

I knew I had to do something, so I spoke, “Ha—”

I wanted to speak in hopes that she would listen to me, but I suddenly felt dizzy.

I didn’t feel dizzy because I was tired. I felt dizzy because Jung Ha-Yan cast a spell on me.

‘What the… What is this… ’

I looked down and saw that I was still in my Dark Plaguelord form. The cogs in my mind turned, and I reckoned that she had to have been worried that I would go crazy if I were to stay in my current form any longer.

If that weren’t the case, it wouldn’t make sense why she suddenly cast some kind of sleeping spell on me.

I prayed that my assumption was right. I fervently prayed that when I woke up, I wouldn’t find myself in a cursed temple or somewhere dark. I tried my best to stay awake, but my eyes weren’t moving out of my volition.

I couldn’t help but admire the leader of the demon contractors. After all, he had withstood a spell from Jung Ha-Yan.

‘That’s right, you bastard. You’re strong enough to take her spells… You sold your soul, so you should be able to take this at the least… It makes sense… damn it. You should at least fight her properly… before dying.’

Crack!

A rift in the ground opened, and the villain sank. At the same time, the clump of magic that Jung Ha-Yan had been channeling finally reached one of the outpost’s

walls.

Crack!

'No…!'

The last scene I saw before losing consciousness was Jung Ha-Yan's spell destroying one of the outpost's walls.

'Ha-Yan… you've become even stronger. Shit…!'

Booom!

"…"

* * *

"Shit!" I shouted and found myself in a hospital room.

I wasn't sure how long I was out, but I felt stiff and sore.

"Y-You're up, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Elena said while blushing.

I figured that I had definitely startled her because she was breathing heavily.

I wasn't sure why she was arranging her clothes, especially the hem of her clothes near her abdomen, but she looked badly startled. She was also sweaty all over, and the way her sweaty hair shone beneath the light made her look really attractive.

I realized that it had been quite a while since I saw her because she looked different from her usual self. Of course, a person wouldn't change a lot in just over a year, but she had definitely matured.

We had been contacting each other through the Goddess' Hand Mirror, but I was still happy to see her personally.

"*Ah*, it's been a while, Miss Elena. When did you arrive?" I asked.

I would have repeatedly cursed if I were by myself because the last scenes I saw before losing consciousness were simply that terrifying. However, my anger toward

Jung Ha-Yan disappeared the moment I heard Elena's answer.

"Miss Jung Ha-Yan… came to see you. She said you're unconscious… I arrived faster than expected because she asked me to come here in a hurry. Miss Hee-Young and Miss Jung-Yeon are also here along with Miss Sora…" Elena replied.

"…"

"…"

'Yeah, it's… not your fault, Ha-Yan.'

I was sure Jung Ha-Yan was stupefied upon realizing that I had gotten caught up in the destruction, but I couldn't really blame her. After all, she had always been the type to lose her mind during situations like that.

I was sure that she was only thinking about killing the enemy and saving me.

Perhaps it was because I still had no idea about the extent of the damage that she had caused, but I kept on nodding at Elena's words.

"*Ah…* I see."

"She was rambling on, so I couldn't really understand her, but I arrived in time thanks to her," she continued.

'I'm sure she cried a lot.'

Well, I couldn't say for sure because I was asleep, but I could imagine it.

"More importantly, can I do a quick check to make sure everything is okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young? You've been in that silver-haired form for three days… You seem fine on the outside, but things might be different inside," she asked.

"What?"

"Thankfully, you returned to your original form after the priests of the Benigoa Order visited you…" she informed.

'Ah, shit. I passed out before returning to my original form.'

“Yes, of course, but it doesn’t look like there’s anything wrong with me physically and mentally. How long… have I been asleep?” I asked.

“Exactly four days,” she answered.

‘I feel like every time I pass out, I’m out for at least three days. I don’t think there’s any reason for me to be out for that long… Does Doom Ki-Young consume more stamina than I thought?’

There was also a chance that Jung Ha-Yan’s spell was just that powerful, but my Stamina was garbage, so the former made more sense than the latter.

Belial had definitely made things convenient for me, but a human body was simply too weak to wield a demon’s power.

The end of that organization was a great example of the human body’s limitations.

‘It’s probably best if I refrain from using it often.’

While I was having many different thoughts, Elena was giving me a check-up with a serious look, but Benigoa changed my job herself, so there wouldn’t be any issues.

A few minutes later, she nodded, looking relieved.

“Fortunately, I don’t think there’s something wrong with your body, but your stamina did drop a lot, so I think it’s best if you take nutritional supplements for the time being. Obviously, don’t skip meals either and refrain from staying up too late,” she suggested.

“I’ll do what I can, but I have to wrap this incident up before anything else,” I told her.

“When you say this incident…”

“How does Zone Five look? And have we secured Mikhail and Natalie? I’m curious about how things were handled, so if you know anything, please tell me,” I asked.

“*Whooo*… I think it’s best if you hear it from someone else instead of from me. They’re out, but if you contact them, I’m sure they’ll come right away. I’ll be out for a bit…” she said.

"Okay."

"And I was so surprised earlier that I forgot to tell you this, but… I-I'm really happy to see you again," she stuttered.

"I'm really happy seeing you again as well," I told her.

Elena hugged me tightly, but she seemed to have felt embarrassed because she hurriedly exited the room as if she were running away. At the sight, I became sure that she was still the same innocent Elena that I knew.

Anyway, the room became quiet after her departure.

'Everyone should be here now, including Sun Hee-Young, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Yoo Ah-Young, who left with Elena… '

The Park-Ki-Ri revolutionary siblings, Jo Hye-Jin, and Jung Ha-Yan, were with me before I lost consciousness, and I was sure they didn't go anywhere else.

Lee Chang-Ryeol had definitely received the news as well.

Elena had told me that Han Sora was here and…

'Kim Hyun-Sung has to be here as well, right?'

I was sure of it—he was definitely here. He had gone into seclusion to train, but I was sure he ran frantically over here after hearing about the incident.

'I've done so much for him… He's a real jerk if he doesn't come here. A real scum.'

I looked through the visitor list next to me and saw the names of my visitors as well as the number of times they had visited me. As expected, Jung Ha-Yan visited me the most.

I was surprised to see that Lee Ji-Hye had only visited me a few times, but it was understandable because she was probably busy cleaning things up.

'Huh? Hee-Ra noona was here as well.'

Kasugano Yuno visited me, too. The guild members and staffers visited me as well,

along with the influential figures of the Sacred Democratic Country.

However, the problem was that I couldn't find Kim Hyung-Sung on the list. I was starting to feel disappointed, but I saw his name on the fourth day.

[Visitor List]

[10/24]

[Kim Hyun-Sung] 08:43 AM - 05:50 PM

Kim Hyun-Sung definitely stayed with me the whole day until the Benigoa Order sent a priest to take care of Doom Ki-Young. I figured that he had to have been really worried because he stayed with me even though I was in my Doom Ki-Young form.

'I wonder if he's okay.'

I had to know who visited me the most while I was asleep and who stayed by my side for the longest time. Kim Hyun-Sung had definitely abused his power to stay by my side for an entire day, but I was sure that the others had approved of it.

Naturally, I smiled in satisfaction. Kim Hyun-Sung's visit and the length of his visit reassured me that I had been doing a great job as his *wife*. My hard work didn't go to waste, so I obviously felt happy.

However, a disturbing thought abruptly popped into my mind, which made me shake my head.

'Ah… this is going to be annoying.'

I was sure that my movements would be limited once more, and I was the type of person who considered the clean-up more important than the incident itself, so I was already starting to get annoyed just thinking about what was coming.

This incident was special, so there were many things that had to be handled. I figured that was the silver lining because I definitely needed time to think. I had to figure out the identity of the demon that had bestowed their powers upon the organization.

Of course, I also had to know how they managed to sneak into Zone Five.

Most importantly, I presumed that Mikhail and the organization had created fake information about me, and I had to stop our lovely regressor from getting his hands on that *evidence.*

'Maybe it would have been great if he hadn't come.'

I know it was a sudden change in attitude, but I had no choice.

I would always appreciate his concerns for my safety, but if he decided to work with me, things would become uncomfortable and difficult to handle.

In the end, I sighed and placed the visitor list back on the table.

"Mr. Ki-Young! Mr. Ki-Young!" Kim Hyun-Sung yelled and kicked the door open.

'Hyung-Sung… Damn it, your hyung just woke up, man.'

It had been nine months since I saw him.

CHAPTER 585
MEETING AFTER A LONG TIME AND (2)

Kim Hyun-Sung's face was drenched with sweat, and the fact that he arrived here before Jung Ha-Yan meant that he ran as fast as he could after receiving the news.

His hair was messy, and it seemed that he had truly secluded himself in a cave somewhere to train. I checked his status window using Mind's Eye, and he had truly become even stronger.

"Mr. Ki-Young, do you know who I am?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

'Of course, I know you, man.' Why would you even ask me that? Were you that afraid that I might have forgotten who you are?

He was still the Kim Hyun-Sung I was familiar with, but he had to have been worried because my Doom Ki-Young form lasted for a tad bit too long.

'He's still just as good-looking as an actor.'

I could see guilt on his face, and it wasn't difficult to deduce why he was guilty.

'I'd be seriously disappointed if you don't feel any sense of guilt.'

I received news about him through Jo Hye-Jin, and he did send me gifts, but he basically disappeared for nine months. A huge incident occurred, and it led to Light Ki-Young suffering injuries at the hands of dirty demon contractors. In addition, I had to bring out Doom Ki-Young and experience all sorts of hardships.

In the end, I fell into a coma that lasted for four days.

However, Kim Hyun-Sung was definitely aware that if he had been by my side, the incident wouldn't have escalated to that degree.

Kim Hyun-Sung thought that there wouldn't be any issues for quite a while, so I understood his decision to go into extreme training mode, but an incident actually

broke out.

However, there was no point in crying over spilled milk.

Light Ki-Young was hurt and heartbroken.

I was glad to see him, but I had to suppress that feeling because I had to think about which path to take to make him keep his distance from me. I thought about persuading him to make him return to his extreme training in seclusion, but that was unlike me.

'I need to drag him around, not get dragged around.'

Rather than creating a friendly atmosphere, it was best to draw the line here. I felt bad, but I had to take care of the aftermath of the incident right now, so I took a deep breath and spoke.

"No," I replied.

"What?" he muttered blankly.

"I can't really remember you because it's been a while since I saw you," I told him.

"*Uh*."

"I'm joking," I said.

However, it was a biting jest. He sighed as if he had lost everything, and he looked kind of shocked and depressed at the same time. I glared at him as if I was telling him to stop pretending like he cared about me, and his gaze immediately turned uneasy.

"I'm sorry. I was… too…" he mumbled.

"There's no need to apologize. I already knew you were busy, and more importantly, your training is very important. You didn't have to come here at all. I mean, you're busy, right? You practically had no time to contact me… Isn't it time for you to return to your training? Don't worry about me and leave. I'm fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said.

"That's not it… I…"

“I recall you have three months left until your return…” I pointed out.

“Actually, I… made some progress… so I-I-I’m… okay now,” he stuttered.

“I’m really okay, so you can go train,” I repeated.

I was sincere, but I made sure to speak ambiguously, which was unlike me.

Kim Hyun-Sung was definitely shocked to hear the peculiar tone in my voice.

‘I’m sorry Hyun-Sung, but… don’t try to offer your help in taking care of the aftermath. Just go do your thing. I have my own things to handle, and I don’t really feel comfortable handling them with you standing next to me.’

“I’m done… with my training,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘There’s no end to training, man. Stop talking bullshit.’

“No, it’s really fine. I’m back to normal, and the incident has been taken care of. I appreciate you worrying about me, but… you have to become stronger. Now, you should leave for your training,” I told him.

‘There’s no point in worrying about me now. Stop worrying about me, and go do your thing.’

“I’m really done with my training. So… so… have you recovered yet?” he asked.

“Yes, and there aren’t any issues. My injuries weren’t that serious, and I apparently fell into a coma because of a lack of stamina. I didn’t get hurt physically or mentally to the point that you need to worry about me. By the way, weren’t you with Miss Hye-Jin?” I asked.

“*Ah*… She’s probably on her way,” he replied.

I wasn’t sure what they were working on, but he left Jo Hye-Jin and came here by himself. As expected, Jo Hye-Jin entered the room. She carefully closed the door and nodded after seeing that I was awake.

“You’re awake,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

"*Ah!* Have a seat, Miss Hye-Jin!" I offered.

"*Oh…* sure," she said.

'Look who it is. It's our Hye-Jin, the pride and hope of the Blue Guild.'

As I looked at her while having that thought, she looked at me as if she was asking, "What's wrong with you? Why are you acting like this all of a sudden?"

"Come here," I said.

I immediately put on a business-like smile and called her with a friendly tone, but her reaction wasn't that great. However, she deserved this kind of treatment.

'Wow… our hero is here. The greatest contributor in the mission to rescue the light of the continent is here!'

The revolutionary siblings were part of the revolution outside the building, but Jo Hye-Jin was the hero who had come by herself just to save me.

While the regressor was focused on his training, she sensed danger and came to my aid. She was so beautiful that she reminded me of Zhao Yun. I wasn't sure about the others, but she deserved to be treated well.

I patted her back while smiling happily, and she looked at me as if my pats had given her goosebumps. However, I wanted to keep complimenting her.

"Here, have some tea, Miss Hye-Jin," I offered.

"I'm… okay," Jo Hye-Jin declined.

She was suspicious that I had put some poison into the tea, but she accepted the tea without any complaint after glancing at Kim Hyun-Sung.

'Our Hye-Jin has become really crafty.'

Jo Hye-Jin was slow-witted, but it seemed that even slow-witted people would eventually learn. She finally realized that Kim Hyun-Sung would get jealous whenever she got close to other men, and that was probably why she accepted my kindness.

It was all because I was obviously not thinking about her *that* way, and my kindness was exaggerated. Normally, she would complain and say, “What are you trying to do? Can you stop making that annoying expression?”

Today, however, she followed me obediently and even drank the tea. It was a sight I wanted to see.

‘At this point, she doesn’t need a coach anymore.’

This naive dummy had grown up and matured at some point.

I was sure that the advice I had given her whenever we were playing chess helped her become even more of an adult.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked kind of uncomfortable and anxious, but I didn’t feel like saying anything to him. He actually looked like he was walking on eggshells.

“So, you see…” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I had a feeling that he was going to give me another bag soon. I was going to give him some attention because he looked like an abandoned puppy, but the guild members finally arrived.

“O-Oppa… *Kgh…* Oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan said. She ran toward me before anyone else.

Our meeting had been a bit faster than promised, but I couldn’t tell her to go back at this point. I was still bothered about the fact that she ended up damaging Zone Five, but I decided to hug her for now.

“*Heuuuuuuung…* I missed you. I missed you,” she cried.

‘Yeah, you endured it well, Ha-Yan. At least you made it this far. Even if you destroyed the wall, you showed me that you’ve become really strong. That wasn’t some ordinary spell.’

Someone else nodded in satisfaction.

‘Sora… You did well.’

I wanted to hug her as well, so I signaled to her to come closer to me, but she seemed

to be a bit afraid and took a step backward instead.

However, Sun Hee-Young approached me and wiped her tears.

“I missed you,” Sun Hee-Young said.

I ended our conversation by patting her back quietly.

I hugged Ahn Ki-Mo, and Lee Chang-Ryeol hugged me at some point, so I started patting his back as well. I had greeted Elena earlier, so I skipped her and greeted Yoo Ah-Young.

We had many guild members, so it took me quite a while to greet everyone.

“Sub Guild Master,” Yoo Ah-Young greeted.

“Did you learn a lot?” I asked.

“Yes, thanks to you,” she replied.

I looked at her using Mind’s Eye, and I noticed that her job had changed.

‘Yes, our precious blacksmith. Looks like you worked hard while working with the dwarves.’

Even Hwang Jung-Yeon—Park Deok-Gu’s woman—had grown a lot.

“Thank you for your hard work at the guild,” I said.

“Are you going to give me a bonus?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“Of course,” I replied.

Kim Ye-Ri looked like she didn’t want to hug me, but she still hugged me.

Afterward, the big pig hugged me tightly. I was worried that he would break my bones, but he seemed to be controlling his strength. He sniffled, so he was probably crying as well. He had always been an affectionate person, so I knew that he would be like this.

However, I was at a loss for words seeing him meet my expectations.

“You’ve been through a lot,” I told Park Deok-Gu.

“You suffered the most, hyung-nim. I didn’t do anything, so from now on, I’ll take care of everything. Just rest,” he said.

‘Please refrain from saying things like that.’

After greeting the guild members one by one, the only one remaining was Kim Hyun-Sung, who was standing awkwardly on the side.

If I could, I would have just ignored him, but I couldn’t do that because the guild members were watching.

I looked at him, and I saw him slowly walking toward me. It was uncomfortable because I was sitting on the bed, but we patted each other’s back.

“I’m… sorry. I’m really… sorry,” Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled.

‘Say that when the guild members aren’t here. They might get the wrong idea.’

“It’s fine. It’s like I told you earlier,” I said.

“I see…” he said.

‘So let’s spend some time apart. It won’t take long. We can get a drink after I’m done taking care of the recent incident.’

I wasn’t sure if he had accepted my true feelings, but Kim Hyun-Sung’s face was filled with regret. I kept on hinting to him that we had to spend some time apart, so he would probably respect my wish and return to his training.

The best way to alleviate Kim Hyun-Sung’s worry was to ask either Jo Hye-Jin or Jung Ha-Yan to be my bodyguard. Perhaps we could also ask Hee-Ra noona if she had time to be my bodyguard for the sake of showing off.

‘Ah… The atmosphere is nice because it’s been a while since we met… I wonder if I’ll ruin the mood if I start talking about work right away.’

I couldn't contain my curiosity about whether Mikhail, Natalie, and the remaining members of the organization were still alive. If they were still alive, I wonder if they managed to catch them.

'I think I should just ask Ji-Hye noona… '

CHAPTER 586
MEETING AFTER A LONG TIME AND (3)

It had been a year since we gathered like this, and it seemed that they hadn't been able to talk and laugh like this over the past four days. It made sense. I was in a coma, after all.

'Actually, it doesn't look like they haven't met each other in a while.'

It seemed that some of them had already met each other before coming here.

'It must have been difficult to meet each other often, though.'

It wasn't strange because everyone had their own missions and tasks. Hwang Jung-Yeon and Sun Hee-Young were still in charge of taking care of the guild, and Kim Hyun-Sung and Jo Hye-Jin couldn't abandon the Continental Joint Training.

Lee Chang-Ryeol and Kim Ye-Ri were busy as well, and their job demanded them to take on several missions. Even Elena was taking care of tasks related to the Others, so Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu were the only ones who weren't really that busy.

I wasn't expecting much from these trolls, but for some reason, I was feeling annoyed. I couldn't assign them an espionage mission, and they didn't really have any administrative experience.

Jung Ha-Yan looked like she stopped training as soon as she arrived here.

I thought perhaps I should have taught her other skills, but I couldn't trust her to do anything. The other guild members probably knew this as well, and that was why they didn't assign them any tasks.

'I don't think it'll be a bad idea to teach Ha-Yan work related to the guild… '

I thought perhaps she would consider the feelings of the guild's staffers before she started any trouble, which meant that she would end up starting fewer troubles.

However, I felt like I would just get anxious watching her work.

The moment I started thinking about Jung Ha-Yan, I remembered how she destroyed a part of Zone Five, so I got curious about the aftermath once more. I wanted to meet Lee Ji-Hye as soon as possible to ask her how things were going.

I hoped everyone had things to do or work they had to catch up on, but it seemed like everyone wanted to rest even if they had work to do.

'Alright then, let's rest for today.'

I wanted to make the guild members leave by pretending to be sick, but there was a high chance that it would only worsen the situation. It would be best for me to stand up and show them that I had recovered, so I stood up slowly.

Everyone's eyes fell on me. Kim Hyun-Sung and a few others ran to me to support me, but Jung Ha-Yan got to me first. The way she ran in a hurry made her look like a mad woman, but it made Park Deok-Gu happy.

"You just trust noonim to take care of our hyung-nim. By the way, is it okay for you to start moving now?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Aside from the lack of stamina, I'm fine… Isn't that right, Miss Elena?" I asked.

"Yes… that's true… but…" Elena mumbled.

'What other unnecessary comments are you trying to make this time? Just stop there. Stop saying useless things, and let's go eat.'

"I'm getting hungry," I said as I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung.

I didn't think it would be a big deal to suggest that we eat, but it was a different story for Kim Hyun-Sung, the Guild Master of the Blue Guild. I wasn't technically part of the Blue Guild anymore, so it was better to let him take the reins when it came to decision-making.

As expected, he nodded and said, "It's been a while since we gathered like this, so I suggest that we all go out and eat."

"I've been waiting for you to say that. Does that mean we're all drinking together

tonight?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I think it's best if we drink moderately. It'd be bad if our productivity gets affected tomorrow. Anyway, it's night, so let's get going instead of standing around here," he suggested.

"I got it, bro. If you're okay… can you drink as well, hyung-nim?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Ki-Young—"

"I think one cup is fine." I interrupted.

"…"

"…"

Everyone looked at Elena, and the elf princess nodded unwillingly. I felt kind of bad, but not spending time with everyone on a day like this was basically torture. Park Deok-Gu was overjoyed, and he started singing strange songs.

Even Jung Ha-Yan seemed excited for some reason.

'Well, I'm pretty excited as well.'

I was happy to see them after such a long time.

I was happy to see Jung Ha-Yan, who stuck to me like a cicada on a tree, and I was happy to hear Park Deok-Gu's voice, even though he was still as loud as always whenever he opened his mouth.

Of course, I was also happy to see Ahn Ki-Mo, who made silly jokes, and Yoo Ah-Young, whose reactions fit the mood. I was grumbling to myself because I was worried, but I didn't dislike the idea of spending time with the guild members.

The guild members immediately got up, and I thought about changing my clothes, but I decided to go out with this clean white shirt and jeans instead.

The restaurant wasn't that far, so we immediately got a table.

The party members never stopped talking.

“By the way, how did you enter the barrier? More importantly, how did you find me?” I asked.

“Actually… I came to play chess with you,” Jo Hye-Jin replied.

“*Ah…*”

‘So we weren’t on the same wavelength.’

“I came here first, but you left for Zone Five, so I immediately got on the griffon. I didn’t expect that something like that would happen, but I did feel that something was fishy…” she explained.

“Hye-Jin noonim is right. I was in the lower area, and I didn’t expect that something like that would happen. I thought there was some sort of ongoing negotiation or something, but the building suddenly exploded, almost giving me a heart attack.

”I almost collapsed when I saw your form, and I’m sure Ki-Mo bro felt the same, am I right, Ki-Mo bro?” he asked.

“I was lucky because Miss Ye-Ri and Mr. Deok-Gu were with me…” Ahn Ki-Mo answered.

“This is all fate. Seeing the puzzle pieces falling into place gave me goosebumps. The Goddess Benigoa led us to that place,” Park Deok-Gu said.

‘You don’t even pray to her… ’

“What was Ye-Ri doing?” I asked.

I looked at Kim Ye-Ri, who was following Kim Hyun-Sung.

“Mr. Deok-Gu said we had to take care of them,” she replied.

“Take care of?” I questioned.

“The stragglers… He asked me to keep an eye on the area near the building,” she replied.

‘Indeed, the sparrow near a school sings the primer.’

Park Deok-Gu's growth made me feel gratified to the point that I wanted to cry.

"So, did you get them?" I asked.

I didn't hear an answer, but Kim Ye-Ri made the *V* sign with her fingers, so I presumed that she had fulfilled her task. I inwardly yelled, "Nice one, Kim Ye-Ri!"

There was no way Mikhail and Natalie could have left. There was a high chance those two reactionaries and the remaining organization members were currently locked up somewhere.

"About Mikhail and Natalie…" I mentioned.

I didn't hear an answer this time either, but I saw Kim Ye-Ri making another *V.*

'Wow, you're amazing… You did a good job as well, Deok-Gu. Really good job.'

"By the way, what have you been up to, hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"It's been the same for me every day. Just doing my work… I'd drink wine by myself sometimes… and work again… What did you do?" I asked.

"I traveled to different places. One year felt short before I left, but it turned out to be an extremely long time. I can't even begin to explain everything that Ki-Mo bro, and I had experienced. We actually went into a dungeon by ourselves, and we almost died there," he replied.

"That's true, and we were also running out of food, so we were in big trouble. We ran out of money as well while traveling. There were times when I wanted to receive help from the guild, but I was kind of embarrassed…

"Anyway, we stopped by different places during our travels, and we also started working. The people treated us better than we expected," Ahn Ki-Mo explained.

"I saw it on Benigoa Net. There were many comments," Hwang Jung-Yeon chimed in.

'Yeah, I knew you would spend a lot of time there. You probably live there.'

"Honestly, Lindel should've done something about it… I thought you were going to make camp in a forest nearby. I couldn't have imagined that you'd travel all the way

north.

”Thanks to you two, there was barely any damage. I was really relieved. *Ah*, you’re probably wondering what happened in Lindel. If you want to know, I have to go back exactly eight months. Well…” Hwang Jung-Yeon paused.

For some reason, I had a feeling this was going to be a long story.

Whenever Hwang Jung-Yeon got chatty, it was best to move as far away from her as possible. Unfortunately, I couldn’t really escape from here, so I turned my attention away from Park Deok-Gu, Ahn Ki-Mo, and Hwang Jung-Yeon.

I heard Yoo Ah-Young and Lee Chang-Ryeol talking to each other.

“…”

“The method was kind of harsh, but I definitely learned a lot. I wasn’t satisfied at first because they started off by teaching me the basics, but I felt like they taught me things the system didn’t teach me…” Yoo Ah-Young explained.

“I see,” Lee Chang-Ryeol said.

“Would you like to see?” she asked.

“…”

Yoo Ah-Young was talking about the time she had spent with the dwarves. Jo Hye-Jin quietly moved away and started talking to Sun Hee-Young as well, but they were probably talking about work.

‘Those two are talking about work even at get-togethers like this.’

The atmosphere was nice. Everyone talked about many different topics and told stories that were long overdue. Even I felt like it had been a while since I genuinely smiled, and my smile got wider upon seeing the food.

“Isn’t this a Mirror Salmon?”

‘Man, that salmon is really delicious.’

It was the food that satisfied my pickiness and stomach.

I completely forgot about it because I didn't have the time to worry about the food I was going to eat, but I was happy to see this dish again.

I wasn't sure why it was here, but it put me in a good mood. White wine was the perfect drink to improve the mood, and it had been a while since we had a proper get-together like this.

Soon, we started getting rowdy, and the restaurant became filled with a cacophony of noises.

"And that's what I said back then! Hey! Let go of my hand!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

Some were telling stories about their adventure, while others were debating passionately.

"Have one more drink, o-o-oppa," Jung Ha-Yan offered.

"Well… it shouldn't be a problem," I said.

"A little more. I-I'll pour it for you," she stuttered.

"It's okay. I still have some left. We haven't seen each other for a long time, so how about we toast?" I suggested.

"Yes, yes, yes," she replied.

"Has it been difficult?" I asked.

"It was… kind of… difficult…" she mumbled.

Just looking at Han Sora made me realize how much Jung Ha-Yan had been struggling.

Han Sora looked at me quietly, and I could tell how many trials and tribulations she had experienced over the past year.

Everyone was having a good time.

I glanced at the awkward Kim Hyun-Sung and realized that my mini plan was working.

He would probably hang around a few steps away from me.

It seemed lacking, but the guild members who had met after a year wrapped up the get-together at two in the morning. I heard many silly stories, but everyone would agree that it was a meaningful gathering.

The next morning, Lee Ji-Hye visited me at the right time.

“Did you have fun last night?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“Yeah, it wasn’t bad,” I replied.

“There was a bag and a letter in front of the door… I don’t know who sent it, but I placed the letter inside the bag. This document contains the list of things I took care of while you were pretending to be in a coma.

”This is the people’s reaction on Benigoa Net… The page after that contains the scale of the damage and the current situation. Unfortunately, we weren’t able to get any information from Mikhail. He said he only wants to talk to you,” she explained.

“*Ugh…*”

“What are you doing? It’s time to work. How much did you drink last night? Hurry up and get up. You’ve rested enough,” she urged.

‘All right, I’m getting up, Ji-Hye.’

I had been waiting for this.

CHAPTER 587
MEETING AFTER A LONG TIME AND (4)

I was exhausted, but Lee Ji-Hye looked more exhausted than me. I was sure she had taken care of the site by herself while I was asleep, so I could understand that she was irritable. Her stress level had to be through the roof based on her tone of voice and other cues, and the reason for her stress had to be the increased workload.

“When one person causes trouble, another person has to clean up their mess. Jung Ha-Yan is seriously annoying. She caused so much trouble, she but doesn’t take responsibility for it. I know that it’s because of her that we managed to send that demon contractor to hell, but still… I’m still annoyed,” Lee Ji-Hye complained.

“The scale of the damage must be bigger than we thought,” I commented.

“I guarantee that Zone Five won’t be able to fulfill its role. It’s not just a crack. It completely collapsed. Some parts of it are still standing, but… we have to repair everything. You’ll probably faint once you see it,” she continued.

“I checked how big the explosion was before I lost consciousness. I didn’t think it’d be this serious, though… How’s the restoration work? Has it started yet?” I asked.

“No, how could we? We made the inner part completely off-limits. I would go in right away if I could, but… What do you know? I discovered something that shouldn’t have been discovered. It’s information those contractors had fabricated, and if it falls into the hands of the workers, they’ll start talking nonsense…” she answered.

‘She’s really good at handling the aftermath of things.’

“No matter how hard we try to control Benigoa Net, we can’t stop people from spreading the information. We need to prevent it ahead of time,” she continued.

“What about the people who were hired to clean up this mess?” I questioned.

“They’re all people you can trust, so don’t worry. Take a look. I’m not sure how systematically they worked, but they were pretty skilled at fabricating information,”

she replied.

“I’m sure they had been preparing this since last year—no, for quite a while now. I guess the quality is understandable,” I commented.

Lee Ji-Hye smiled as she handed me a document.

‘She’s really shameless.’

I played along because of the atmosphere, but I was surprised she could say that like it was nothing. I grabbed the documents she gave while smiling and flipped them over, and I realized the reactionary bastards worked hard.

‘They really did their best.’

I wasn’t sure how they managed to do a background check on me, but the information was very detailed. I noticed some information was either missing or summarized, but it was still easy to understand.

The document explained what kind of person I was, and there was even a detailed analysis of how I got to my current position from the tutorial dungeon. It was scary. I sensed an unknown obsession and rage that was beyond hostility. The scariest part was that I had no idea that they had been investigating me.

‘Looks like I’ve been pretty lax.’

I thought I was being pretty cautious, but it seemed that what I had been doing wasn’t enough.

It listed the Fantasy Potion I used during the Ito Sota incident, the demon summoning incident in Laios, the Undead creatures during the war with the Republic, and the 27th Legion kidnapping incident, along with other big and small incidents.

“Each part has hundreds of pages of supporting documents, and that’s not all. Fortunately, the majority of them are assumptions, and they lack evidence to support their claims. There are even parts that are obviously forced together.

”However, even if we nitpick, it can’t be denied that those reactionaries were thorough,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“I agree,” I commented.

“It contained information about the Goddess’ Mirror and Hand Mirror, media manipulation and propaganda, the Rift Museum, unfair trading and market manipulation related to potion distribution, and even the black market. That part surprised me a bit.

”Anyway, they made you into an even scummier person. I didn’t do much, but… There were things that bothered me, and the way they evaluated you was too harsh. They’re stupid, and they have bad eyes; they don’t know how to evaluate someone at all,” she continued.

‘What the hell is she talking about?’

“It’s already day five, but we still keep on finding things. If the building hadn’t collapsed, we wouldn’t have to suffer like this…” she added.

“There’s no use crying over spilled milk…” I commented.

“So what do you think? I want to hear your opinion,” she said.

“Like you said, they’re skilled at fabricating information, but that’s it. Who would believe this?” I questioned.

And that was probably why they couldn’t use this document. If they were to post this on Benigoa Net, they would definitely get caught. No media outlet was gutsy enough to publish these documents to the world. All they could do was work hard and use it for educational purposes to justify their actions.

I finally understood how the reactionaries and the group that worked with them had been completely brainwashed. Anyone would get brainwashed if they were given this kind of document with nothing else.

‘I’ll have to pay more attention to the area around Zone Five.’

The other issues weren’t a plague.

This thing was the plague. Their movement had to be limited, so I didn’t think this *plague* had spread that far, but I couldn’t dismiss the possibility of this spreading to a different area. 99 people out of 100 wouldn’t be swayed by this, but it could still

sway one person out of a hundred, so it was better to completely exterminate this.

“Where’s Mikhail?” I asked.

“He’s right below us. Are you going to head there now?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“Yeah, I think that’s the best thing to do… Let me make some preparations… I should at least dress for the party. You didn’t question him yourself, did you?” I asked.

“I just took out my anger on him a bit, but I didn’t do an official interrogation. The Blue Guild said they would interrogate him, but once I used you as an excuse, they became quiet. Anyway, hurry up and get ready so we can head there right now,” she urged.

“I just need a minute. Call Hye-Jin and Park Lian just in case,” I ordered.

“Do you need bodyguards?” she questioned.

“I’m just using them to show off. *Ah*, have you found evidence of a magic circle being used for demon summoning in Zone Five?” I asked.

“Not yet, but we should be able to find something soon. I think they’ve been spending time underground like rats… Just yesterday, that place was completely buried… You understand what I’m saying, right?” she asked.

“Yeah, I got it,” I answered.

They lacked manpower. If they simply had to demolish the place, it wouldn’t have taken them so long to do so. However, Zone Five had basically become a huge piece of evidence, so they had to be careful about handling it.

That was why the Committee had full control of the site while talking bullshit about how there could still be demonic energy around.

‘I was kind of worried, but it looks like they got it under control.’

I was sure that they were having a hard time because I wasn’t there.

Anyway, I washed up, dressed up, and left my room.

I saw Lee Ji-Hye urging me to leave. She had to have contacted Jo Hye-Jin ahead of time because she was waiting for me as well. Jo Hye-Jin seemed unhappy because she was busy with her own work as well. Still, she understood that I needed a bodyguard.

"Didn't the guild master say that he'll guard you himself? Why did you call me? He seemed like he was waiting for your call," Jo Hye-Jin complained.

"The reason isn't important. I know you like walking with me," I told her.

"That's true, but…" she paused.

"Let's play chess after we're done. You can finish your tasks—"

"You're not the only one who's busy," she interrupted.

"I know you two are close, so let's get going already. We have a lot to do today," Lee Ji-Hye chimed in.

"Who's close with whom?" she questioned.

'How does it make me look if you deny it like that? I'm kind of sad.'

I wasn't sure whether she was joking or not, but I noticed Jo Hye-Jin talking quietly to Lee Ji-Hye.

Now that I thought about it, this had to be the first time I saw them together.

Jo Hye-Jin was *Castle Rock's Stubborn Woman,* so I wasn't sure how she was going to treat Lee Ji-Hye, but for some reason, I had a feeling that these two would never become close with each other.

The awkward atmosphere between them was suffocating, and they didn't really look at each other kindly.

I wanted to film an episode of *Hope to Get Close,*[1] but it's not like they were going to see each other often, so I didn't want to take charge and get stressed over it.

"The guild master told me to take care of you again and again, but… Why didn't you call for Miss Ha-Yan…"

“Are you telling the truth?” I asked.

“It was a slip of the tongue,” she replied.

Jo Hye-Jin got really quiet.

I would’ve taken Jung Ha-Yan with me if I were going to a really dangerous place, but there was no point in doing such a thing.

I wasn’t even meeting the demon contractors.

Mikhail was just an ordinary person. He was also tied up, so I couldn’t understand why I had to be careful when he couldn’t even move. Honestly, I wanted to go there without Jo Hye-Jin if it were possible.

I continued walking while having silly thoughts, and the surroundings got darker and darker as I entered the prison under the management of the Committee.

It had been a while since I last visited the place, but the environment that was comparatively clean started changing the deeper I got into the prison. I would sometimes hear screams, and the stench was getting worse as well.

Jo Hye-Jin frowned slightly, but she didn’t say anything.

After passing through five large doors, I saw the face I wanted to see.

‘That traitorous bastard… ’

It was Mikhail, the helper.

The war criminal who supported the demon contractors and tried to poison the light of the continent. He was a notorious fraud who had supported the enemies of the continent with the blood of the denizens of the continent.

He had committed all sorts of illegal acts to push the workers over the edge.

He deserved to receive the title *Human Trash*, and he was undeniably a criminal.

‘You look good, you bastard.’

Mikhail was dozing off as his head was bobbing while he was tied to a chair, but he looked straight at me quietly after seeing me He looked dejected, but he didn't look like he had acknowledged the fact that he had made a mistake.

He was probably still thinking that he had made the right decision.

"It's… been a while," I said.

"Nice to… see you again, Chairman Lee Ki-Young," Mikhail greeted.

"I don't know what I can say to comfort you, but… it's really unfortunate that the situation turned out this way. Don't you agree? I'm sure you know very well why I'm here… Before we get down to business, I'd like to ask you a question," I paused.

"…"

"Why did you betray the continent? Why did you throw away your chance to live with your own hands by being an ass in a lion's skin? It's a bit embarrassing to say this, but I trusted you a lot, and that's why I gave you an important position and a chance.

"However, you betrayed my trust," I said.

"…"

"I'm pretty tender-hearted, you know. Man, you have no idea how hurt I was when you served me poisoned tea. So explain yourself, man. Why did you betray the continent?" I repeated.

"Faith," Mikhail responded.

"What?" I asked.

"It's because of faith," he repeated.

"…"

"…"

"Is that so? Have you heard this saying before, then?" I asked.

“…”

“There’s nothing scarier than idiots with faith,” I said.

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1. A segment from a Korean show called "Infinite Challenge"

CHAPTER 588
UNKNOWN FUTURE (1)

"There's nothing scarier than idiots with faith. Now that I think about it, they must've been talking about people like you. It can't be helped since you don't know what's going on on this continent, what's here, and what's coming. It would've been so much better if you remained quiet like other people. Faith, my ass… How can you even say that after seeing the mess that the demon contractors made?" I asked.

"What you told me just now… could also be an answer to your question," Mikhail said.

"What?" I questioned.

"Every intelligent being on this land deserves to think for themselves, make their own decision, and live their own lives. They must act freely of their own will and conviction. That's what being human means… *Pant*… That's how humans live," he explained.

"…"

"I want to thank you again… for helping me realize how you view your people, what you think of them, and how you treat them. Thank you very much for proving that I didn't make the wrong decision," he continued.

He must've had a hard time continuing the conversation because he would breathe heavily from time to time.

'He's seriously talking bullshit.'

I wanted to laugh because of how ridiculous the situation was.

'Intelligent being? Making decisions for themselves? You didn't make the wrong decision?'

I started thinking that he watched too many of the animations that didn't exist on the

continent.

“It looks like you watched too many animations. I can’t understand what you’re saying at all… No one loves the people as much as I do,” I told him.

“They’re not stupid, and they’re more than capable of standing on their own two feet. I… just thought your methods were incorrect. You're probably thinking that you’re the cure of the continent, but that’s not the case. You’re cancerous to the continent. You’re nothing but a tyrant who deceives the people and makes them conform to what you want. You’re turning them into idiots,” he said.

“…”

“The continent is rotting away. Your greed is… destroying the entire continent,” he added.

“Nicely said, Mr. Mikhail. That’s what I liked about you… So, are you done talking?” I asked.

“The plan ended in failure, but I don’t regret rebelling against you. I believe I’ve completed my task and…”

“I don’t understand what I did wrong that you’re cornering me like this,” I interrupted.

“I’m sure you know,” he commented.

“There are some questionable things, but everything I did was for the continent. You’re probably thinking that I made them forfeit their rights, but it doesn’t change the fact that I served the continent. Turn around and see how advanced the continent has become. Let’s start with the Democratic Country. You must’ve forgotten the fact that the Holy Democratic Country was once called the Holy Empire,” I reminded him.

“Nothing changed. You and Oscar took the emperor and princess’ position, and the nobles became part of Congress. The revolution was your victory, not the people’s victory. You make it sound nice by calling it a sacred democracy, but the current Democratic Country can’t be considered a democracy-oriented nation.

”It’s nothing more than you trying to gain power by using the goddess’ name. More

than half of the Congress is made up of people who are on your side, and the media outlets, as well as the administration agencies, are under your control.

”That’s not democracy. It’s just a management change, but the managers are more wicked than the previous ones,” he explained.

“*Haha*, the fighters of democracy who participated in the revolution of the empire would feel very sad if they heard what you’re saying. Who was the one who removed the caste system in the Benigoa Holy Empire?” I asked.

“The current Democratic Country does not differentiate commoners and nobles, but a social rank still exists… The Democratic Country is still utilizing the caste system, and you’re the one who created the ranks,” he said.

“There’s no denying that the quality of life has improved as a result,” I commented.

“The gap between the rich and poor still exists,” he said.

“Despite really caring for the commoners, you've ignored the pain of the workers.” I pointed out.

“I do feel bad for them, but…” he paused.

“It was a sacrifice for the greater good. *Wow…* You’re simply amazing. The saying—it’s all a matter of perspective—-really fits you. *Geez*… So you committed a crime for the greater good? I don’t understand why you don’t think the same for the things that I’ve been doing,” I said.

“…”

“…”

Mikhail remained quiet for a moment, but he didn’t seem surprised because even I thought that it sounded like a fallacy.

“Well, I won’t deny your comments, Mr. Mikhail,” I said.

“…”

“However, let’s get one thing straight. I respect humans, and I don’t think negatively

about them or believe that they're stupid like you think. Who in the world would deny the potential of an individual? I'm not trying to control the teachings because I think humans are stupid. The problem is that these bastards are too smart," I continued.

"…"

"It won't be a problem if only one guy is smart, but the fact that these smart bastards are fighting each other and grouping up is the problem," I added.

"You're…" he mumbled.

"Normally, I wouldn't really care. I don't care what's happening where, who's fighting, and what kind of stupid things people are doing behind my back. The only thing I need to worry about is my well-being… But you see, I'm not in a situation where I can just stand by and watch people do those stupid things, Mr. Mikhail.

"Are you sure we should trust humans? Trust the people?" I questioned.

"That's…"

"Look at the result. You should know already. Think carefully and see what kind of results are born whenever the process is left to the people. No need to look far. Start with the incident that happened near us. Actually, what was the continent like a few years ago before I came here?

"I wonder how peaceful it was that you're missing the old days. You must've been really happy to shout for people's freedom while making sure that all of them would benefit," I said.

"…"

"The birth rate and economic rate must have been through the roof. It must have been peaceful. There weren't any fights, and you must have been living a really happy life. Shit, perhaps my arrival here was a bad thing. I think what I learned about the continent before my arrival must have been lies, don't you think?" I asked.

"…"

"You know that's not the case. War never ends, and many people have died due to the

famines back then. There was always trouble everywhere, and people encouraged everyone to dive into shit together while arguing with each other. At least, that's how I remember it. It's pretty strange because I have a pretty good memory," I continued.

"Are you saying that you're right, sir?" Mikhail asked.

"You can tell just by looking at the current Republic. Those bastards from the organization are pretty stupid as well. There's a limit to being nostalgic. You knew from the start that Jin Cheong wasn't innocent. He's a war criminal. The Republic started the war first, and the Democratic Country and the Blue Guild were the victims. That's not the only trouble they caused. Small battles always occurred at the border, and dozens of people would die every day.

"And what about the members of the other races? The other races suffered a lot after becoming slaves, and they were discriminated against by the humans that you love, Mr. Mikhail.

"Their fight with the other races had been ongoing since time immemorial, the strong bullied the weak, and the weak bullied those who were weaker than them. They fought and pointed their swords at each other for silly reasons.

"What do you think, Mr. Mikhail? I'm not trying to show off, but what do you think would have happened if I hadn't arrived here? Do you think humans would've been able to unify as one and worked hard toward a new future?" I questioned.

"…"

"Why has mankind not taken a bold step towards a new future for thousands and thousands of years throughout the history of the continent? Despite the fact that the humans you trust so much are living a life of freedom, why haven't they been able to walk towards a happy future? Aren't you curious? I don't know the answer, but if you do, enlighten me, Mr. Mikhail," I explained.

"It's just self-justification, and you're justifying your tyrannical behavior," Mikhail answered.

"No one cares," I said.

"What do you…"

“I’m making all this fuss because of the weight I’m carrying. I don’t have any grand plan or goal like you guys are probably thinking. If I were to be a bit more blunt, I’m doing all of this to take care of my people. I’m not trying to show off, but let’s just look at the results. Listen, punk, do you know who it is who stopped the continental war?” I asked.

“…”

“The people of the continent have been fighting each other for tens of thousands of years, but they suddenly closed their mouths and started working toward a single, common goal. Who do you think was responsible for that?”

“What could have happened if I had allowed everyone to decide for themselves and abandoned all control?”

“Your methods are…”

“As I mentioned before, I’m completely against your opinion. Despite that, let’s assume that you and your organization managed to build the world that you wanted, and as you said, the continent may become peaceful one day.

”I believe that humanity will soon regret what they have been doing and start holding hands with the people of the continent and unite for the sake of one goal.

”However, I’m a very skeptical person. In other words, there’s no point in me making that kind of decision while assuming that *something* will happen and stressing myself out waiting for it,” I explained.

“Your methods are wrong,” he said.

“Can you still think the same if you know that some punks will appear out of nowhere in the future to make a mess and destroy your plans? Can you preach about freedom and being completely out of the Committee’s control at the same time?

”I’d say that it’s highly unlikely. My actions are born from studying the history of mankind rather than the bullshit that idealists have been preaching about, Mr. Mikhail,” I continued.

“…”

“Talk about your fucking love for mankind in comic books, punk. I have no intention of saving the continent while taking so many risks. Do you understand? Actually, it’s thanks to this incident that I was convinced once again.

”Do you really think a calculative person like me would spend millions of gold coins to build walls for no reason?” I questioned.

“T-That’s…” he stuttered.

“Ji-Hye noona,” I called out.

“What?” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

“Bring Kasugano Yuno here,” I ordered.

“All right,” she said.

“Thanks.”

“Is there really a need to show him? It’s not like things will change… Anyway, I’ll bring her here,” she commented.

Lee Ji-Hye left, and Mikhail fell into deep contemplation. A soundproof spell was cast, so Jo Hye-Jin and Park Lian couldn’t hear our conversation, but they had an idea based on the atmosphere.

I thought I would have to wait for quite a bit, but Kasugano Yuno soon arrived rather than later. After I became the Chairman of the Committee, I couldn’t meet Kasugano Yuno as often as I wanted. I nodded at her silent greeting.

I wanted to say something, but it seemed that she didn’t need any explanation.

I signaled to her quietly, and she slowly approached Mikhail.

“What are you trying to do… right—” Mikhail paused.

“Shut up and look straight into her eyes,” I ordered.

“You can’t—”

“Stop your bullshit fantasies and look into that woman’s eyes,” I repeated.

Mikhail immediately went quiet upon meeting Kasugano Yuno’s gaze. He seemed to have fallen unconscious. I went quiet as well, and I felt like I was getting sucked away somewhere.

CHAPTER 589
UNKNOWN FUTURE (2)

What I saw wasn't the Dark World. It felt more like I was watching an event in the near future. An army of humans was surrounded by pigeon-looking angels, and the army immediately collapsed the moment the angels pulled out their spears.

The cities were destroyed. There were neverending screams, bloody rivers, and mountains of corpses. Even the countryside wasn't spared, as the small villages were filled with mountains of corpses beneath the crimson sky.

'Help… Help me.'

'Ahhhhhhhhhhh!'

'Oh god… Have you truly forsaken us?'

The group of humans looked desperate as they were trying to stop the army of angels flying over the wall. The battlefield was so horrible, and it was filled with a cacophony of voices.

I saw a warrior missing an arm roaring furiously while swinging his sword, and I also saw another warrior without legs shooting arrows while biting his lips to endure the pain. I had seen many battles, but it was my first time seeing a battle this brutal.

'Mother… Mother.'

'Don't give up no matter what. We're fighting for the continent. Remember that our families are behind us, lights of the continent.'

'We can't let the monsters wearing the masks of angels take over the continent no matter what.'

The wall created with mana stones collapsed, and the army that looked like it was led by the Outer God was taking over the Union of Kingdoms. The frightened

denizens of the continent cried out in despair and pain.

I also saw people on their knees begging to be spared. A mother stood up to protect her child, but an angel's spear pierced her heart. Her husband was instantly furious at the sight, and he rushed to save his wife, but his head immediately went flying.

It looked like hell, and I couldn't help but bite my lips at the many different unfolding situations. I wasn't angry at the heartbreaking scenes that the commoners were showing. The issue was that this was happening in Zone Five.

I assumed this future would unfold if we failed to repair Zone Five.

'Looks like she can see this kind of future as well.'

Kasugano Yuno had grown a lot as well, and it was my first time seeing this kind of scene. Actually, the time period was the same, but the result was different. I recall the situation being more tense, but the outpost was collapsing here, and the army was getting pushed back without being able to put up a proper fight.

The future in front of me continued playing while I was having many different thoughts. The members of the Blue Guild and Kim Hyun-Sung were fighting desperately, Dialugia was surrounded by the angels while I was throwing Light Bomb Potions on top of her, and Jung Ha-Yan was killing the angels with her spells along with the Eight Seats of the Democratic Country.

Meanwhile, Cha Hee-Ra was ripping off the wings of the angels with her bare hands.

The chaotic battlefield was very different from what I initially imagined. It was a scene I wanted to show Mikhail, and there were many helpful scenes as well.

'This is the… bad ending.'

I wasn't sure yet, but it seemed that humanity had no chance of turning the tables around. At this rate, the pigeons would soon annihilate everyone. The Blue Guild's formation also didn't look stable, even though Park Deok-Gu was at the helm.

I focused a bit more to absorb more information, but Kasugano Yuno's ability ended as an angel attacked the nearest opponent with its spear.

'…'

It felt as if she was telling us that we were only allowed to see this much.

'It ends like this every time.'

I was kind of sad, but if Kasugano Yuno had discovered something new, she would have already come to me before I could even ask her. In other words, there was a high chance that what we saw was Kasugano Yuno's limit.

I calmed myself by tapping my thigh with my finger, and that was when I heard something annoying.

"*Bleeeeeeeech…"*

'…'

"*Bleeeeeeergh…"*

Mikhail started vomiting, which was a sharp contrast to her determined demeanor from earlier.

"*Haaa… huff… haaa… Bleeergh… Bleeeech! Bleeeeech…"*

"Did you see it?" I asked.

'He doesn't look like he's in any condition to talk.'

He was frowning, and I wasn't sure if he was crying because he had to vomit or if it was because of the shock, but his face covered in snot and tears was a sign to behold.

He looked wasted as he kept on vomiting

"*Bleech… Blergh… haaa… huff… haa…"*

"I expected this, but I guess the shock is greater than I expected. I'd like to hear your opinion because you've just gotten a peek into the future. What do you think?" I asked.

"*Bleeech… haaa… haaa…"*

"What do you think?" I asked again.

"*Pant… pant…*"

"I asked what you thought about seeing the future," I said.

"…"

"…"

"R-Right now, I-I-I…" Mikhail stuttered.

"I won't ask you to believe what you just saw, Mr. Mikhail. Believing is up to you… and I'm sure you're tired of me explaining every little thing. Only four people have seen that sight, so you should be a bit more happy. No need to be sad," I said.

"What… I saw just now…" he muttered.

"I don't know exactly when it will happen, but it'll happen in the near future. Personally, I'd like to think that we have some time left, but… I don't know exactly when it'll happen. Two years or maybe even five years later… I don't know.

"However, the outfit and the fashion taste of the denizens are familiar, so it'll definitely happen within ten years or perhaps even a year later," I explained.

"I can't… believe it," he said.

"As I said, believing is up to you. I've shown you everything I could possibly show you, Mr. Mikhail. I announced that there was an upcoming threat, and I continued raising awareness about it across the continent. Idiots who believe the rumors will think that it's my evil plan to conquer the world, but I don't have the luxury to care about each and every one of those bastards.

"I have been doing everything within my power. You must have forgotten Goddess Benigoa's descent upon my fleshly body, so I decided to show you more concrete evidence. However, it's a shame that you still aren't willing to believe me," I told him.

"…"

"Hey, Mikhail. Do you really think I'm that bored to throw away so much money just to build a wall and create outposts? Do you think I invested all that money into the Continental Joint Training to build an army that'll help me get one step closer to

becoming a dictator? A crazy bastard like that doesn't exist in this world," I continued.

"That's—*eup!*" he stopped.

"This is what I was telling you earlier, Mr. Mikhail. People who won't understand things even after telling them are a dime a dozen, so how could I act like the protagonist of a shonen manga who leaves all decisions to the people? Do you finally understand what I meant when I told you that everyone would die if I hadn't done what I had done?

"Do you also finally understand what I meant when I said that I didn't want to take such a huge risk by letting the people decide the outcome?" I questioned.

"Still… But… still…" he mumbled.

"I know that it's morally wrong, but I have no choice. Sometimes, you need to compromise with the world. Have you heard of the Trolley Dilemma? I'll always pull the lever that will save five people rather than one.

"In our case, we don't even need to sacrifice that one person. Unlike the freedom you've been preaching about, we're not going to sacrifice one person to save five," I explained.

"…"

"I'd rather live even if it means rolling around in shit. It's better to be a bit unethical than for all of us to die together. Don't you agree?" I asked.

"There must be… There must be another way. You're an… intelligent…"

"I'm not intelligent. If I really were smart, I would have found another way. By the way, don't even think about suggesting that I trust the people again. I already tried, and it's even more hellish than the future I saw just now," I warned him.

"…"

"…"

"W-Why did you show me that?" Mikhail asked.

“Why do you think I showed it to you?” I questioned.

“I-I’m not sure,” he stuttered.

“Think carefully. Why do you think I showed this to you?” I asked again.

“…”

“…”

“You already know the answer,” I commented.

“You need my help,” he answered.

“…”

“I believe you did it because you need my help, but I don’t exactly know what you want… Y-You must think… I can h-help you… stop them. Is that the reason you showed me that? To convince me and b-because you have a job for someone like me who’s lacking…” he added.

“That’s the answer I’ve been waiting for,” I commented.

“Can I ask… what kind of job you prepared for me? I’m still… I’m still confused and don’t really understand anything. I don’t know why you’re trying to convince me… just what is it? What can I do? In the first place, what’s the right thing to do?

”I don’t know what choices I need to make. I’m still rejecting you in my heart, but my head is telling me to follow you. It’s telling me to do my best and protect the continent. If… If what I saw is something that’ll really happen in the near future—” he paused.

“That’s not the answer,” I interrupted.

“…”

“It’s the answer I’ve been waiting for, but that wasn’t the answer,” I said.

“What… do you… mean?” Mikhail asked.

"*Pffft… Haha*," I laughed.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked.

"*Hahaha*. I'm laughing because it's funny. Do you truly believe that? Do you think I showed you this because I need your help? Do you really believe that? Unfortunately, you're wrong, Mr. Mikhail. There's no special reason," I replied.

"What… do you…" he mumbled.

"There really is no reason. I just wanted to prove to you that you're wrong," I told him.

"W-What?" he stuttered.

"I said I wanted to show you that you're wrong, *hahahaha*. That's why I showed it to you. Do you really think I had some special reason? I was just taking my anger out on you… *Hahaha*. I just wanted to show the cold and harsh reality to an idealist like you. *Hahaha*. I feel better now. Did you know that your gaze put me in a bad mood?" I questioned.

"*Wow*… I already knew this about you, but… oppa… you really have a shitty hobby… It's shit," Lee Ji-Hye chimed in.

'Okay, Ji-Hye. That's not true.'

"Why would I use you again? If we're living in an ideal world, I would have probably said something along the lines of—we already fought once, so let's become comrades—

"Unfortunately, this isn't an ideal world. I don't trust people who have already backstabbed me because if they could backstab me once, they would definitely backstab me again. *Hahaha!"*

"Did you think I'd give you a job again? Do you want to join my cause and save the continent with me? You want to fight with the light now? I can't let you do that. I mean, you've already helped the demons, you bastard," I said.

"Y-You crazy bastard…!" he cursed.

“Fuck you. Just tell me what you know. That’s the only way you can contribute to the continent,” I told him.

CHAPTER 590
KEY PLAYER (1)

“He doesn’t know as much as I thought,” Lee Ji-Hye commented.

“Still, I don’t think it was that bad… Honestly, I had low expectations. It seemed like he only knew just about as much as I expected,” I said.

“Should I try to get more information out of him?” she asked.

“Is there really a need for you to do that?” I asked.

“Actually, wouldn’t it be better to hand him over to the Vatican? It’ll be a lot better if we hand him over along with Natalie to the heresy inquisitors. I actually received a call from them not that long ago about how they want to interrogate those two. I didn’t answer because I thought you wouldn’t want that, but I think they’re still waiting for an answer,” she explained.

“*Hm*, what should we do? Should we just hand them over? I mean, it’s going to be troublesome if we deal with them.” I asked.

“I told you everything I know, so…” Mikhail muttered.

“Man, you were trying to protect your pride earlier, so what are you doing right now? This is why people with someone precious to them shouldn’t do silly things like this.

”If it hadn’t been for the fact that Oppa has a soft spot, things wouldn’t have ended like this. If the decision were up to me, I would have already taken your heads with your mouths open. I can also make sure that you’ll live, but your life will be an actual living hell. You should be thankful that he’s merciful,” she said.

“…”

“…”

“Let’s just hand them over,” she suggested.

“I honestly don’t care what happens to them now, but if possible… I’d like them to be alive. I think a public execution wouldn’t be so bad either… It’s about time we showed something like that to the public. Actually, I think it’s best if we keep them alive,” I said.

“If you need time to think, I’ll lock him up in here until you make a decision since the manager of the heresy inquisitor keeps on contacting me. You take care of this, oppa, okay?” she requested.

“All right. I don’t think we have any other business here… Let’s leave,” I told her.

“Okay, but oppa…” she paused.

“Yeah?”

“Why did you say that at the end?” she asked.

“Did I say something strange?” I questioned.

“If you had spoken with a bit more emotion, you would have become a righteous éminence grise struggling between being ethical and unethical. It’s sad that you ruined your image by laughing like that just to make fun of one guy,” he replied.

“I’m not going to see him again, anyway, so what’s the point of maintaining my image? I just felt like shit; that’s why I did it. I find it ridiculous how those criminals think they’re righteous until the end. They haven’t contributed anything to the continent, and they’re actually daring enough to criticize me about how I should run things. It’s absurd.

”*Hm*… Mr. Mikhail. If you were in my shoes, what would you have done?” I asked.

“…”

“You probably wouldn’t have gotten this far. You probably would’ve died in the middle of it because of a dilemma… Well, there’s no point in continuing this conversation… Anyway, take care, Mr. Mikhail. I’ll prepare you a special meal from time to time, so don’t lose courage and keep living.

”Study hard. You can do it, Mikahil! *Ha… Hahaha*.” I laughed.

“I know you’re having fun, but stop making fun of him. Be serious,” she suggested.

Wouldn’t it be better to do this to lighten up my heavy heart?

However, I still nodded as if I were acknowledging her suggestion, and Lee Ji-Hye sighed lightly at that.

Her satisfied expression betrayed her words, and the fact that she was humming lightly made me think that the information we had obtained wasn’t that bad.

‘Well, at least we have a lead.’

Unfortunately, we didn’t get enough information about the demon, which I considered to be the most important. To be precise, Mikhail wasn’t a member of the organization, so he probably had no idea, but… I thought he would have some information about it.

‘Those demon contractors… ’

We didn’t get enough information about the crux of the matter. I thought Mikhail would at least know the demon’s name, but I felt uncomfortable by the fact that he didn’t know.

I couldn’t help but think that perhaps Benigoa knew the demon’s name. Otherwise, there had to be some clues in Zone Five. Lee Ji-Hye had confirmed that there was a secret room beneath Zone Five, so our top priority at the moment was to reach it.

‘I think it’s best if Kasugano tags along.’

There was a chance that she might figure out what happened in the secret room, the contract conditions, and if the demon was higher in rank compared to Belial.

‘I could benefit from it as well… ’

I started thinking about who should explore the hideout. Kim Hyun-Sung was out. We were close enough to share our deepest secrets with each other, but he was hostile against demons, so he couldn’t join. If it were just as simple as taking care of the remaining organization members, I’d gladly ask him to join us, but…

‘The expedition’s goal is different.’

I had to use my acting skills for this goal.

'I should take Han Sora.'

I was kind of worried, but I had to take Jung Ha-Yan as well. Those two had experience when it came to black magic, so they definitely possessed a lot of knowledge about it, especially Han Sora.

The hostile organization members' research was probably there because it was only natural for them to gather their research in one place for the sake of studying them at once to fulfill their long-cherished wish.

I was sure the documents in that place would contain information about the suicide bombers, the secret to their tenacious life force, and the source of their power.

It would look like a gruesome place to outsiders, but it was no different from a treasure trove in Han Sora's eyes. There was also a huge chance that it contained catalysts and experiment results that I could use as the Dark Plaguelord.

In other words, the two of us would profit from such an expedition.

'These bastards really did do it for the continent. They were trying to transfer all this information to us. It's giving me goosebumps. They're more of a hero than villains.'

Kasugano Yuno, Jung Ha-Yan, Han Sora, and I would be exploring the demon cave.

I had second thoughts about bringing a vanguard, but the remaining organization members might try to pull something, so it would be best to take someone.

I thought Park Deok-Gu and Jo Hye-Jin wouldn't be enough, but they were the only available vanguards in the guild.

I walked while having silly thoughts about taking some of my bodyguards, and I noticed Kasugano Yuno staring at me. Now that I thought about it, I hadn't said anything to her just yet.

"Good job," I complimented her.

"I just did my job, Mas—Chairman Lee Ki-Young," Kasugano Yuno said.

'What was she trying to say?'

"I'm thinking about going to Zone Five to look around. Can you come with me?" I asked.

"Yes. I actually wanted to request that I go with you," she replied.

"And about what happened afterward…" I said.

"I'm sorry. I-I haven't seen anything about both the Dark World or the future. What we saw last time was the last thing I saw… I apologize," she said.

"It's fine. It can't be helped, so you don't have to apologize. It can be the smallest change, so if anything is different from before, please tell me right away. I'm sure you already know, but a big change that can be seen with the naked eye seems to have an immediate influence in the future…" I said.

"…"

"It's like what we saw just now. I'm sure that when I first saw that time period, I remember the continent wasn't that bad… The variable we saw just now in that scene… Is it because of Zone Five's collapse?" I asked.

"Yes, your assumption is probably correct. Otherwise, there has to be another variable. The restoration work for Zone Five still hasn't started, but it has to be restored," she answered.

'That's true.'

"There's also a chance that the future will change if you don't take action and just make decisions. In some ways, the restoration work for Zone Five is a future that we have already confirmed, but if things still don't go your way, there has to be an unexpected variable," she continued.

"An unexpected variable…" I mumbled.

'My head hurts… '

I somewhat understood what Kasugano was saying.

'She's right.'

The restoration work for Zone Five still hadn't started, so wouldn't it be better to just leave it alone? Lee Ji-Hye and I had planned things out so that we could fix the place as soon as possible, even if it meant sending all the workers there, but if something went wrong, everything would go down the drain.

In other words, it was better to address the issue at its root first.

'What's going to happen?'

Would the Outer God arrive before we could even start fixing Zone Five? I was sure that it wouldn't be the case. There was no way it would arrive so soon. Perhaps the Outer God had followers somewhere, or was the restoration work the issue?

What if this incident was the reason for this butterfly effect?

It was one question after the other. I pretended like I was fine, but I had to think about it seriously, as I really focused on the future that Kasugano Yuno had seen. How could we even hope to stand up against the Outer God when we couldn't even stop its minions?

At this rate, it wouldn't be so bad to gather the Blue Guild and my acquaintances and then just be friendly with the Outer God.

"Don't think too much about it. The smallest details will change the future. I'm sure you think it's unusual for me to tell you this, but it's better not to be obsessed with the future you've seen. I'm sure that you'll obtain whatever you desire, Master," Kasugano Yuno reassured.

"Thank you," I said.

"If I was out of place, I apologize…"

"No, I'm genuinely thankful. I also feel bad for not taking care of you better…" I told her.

"If you say that…" she mumbled.

"Let's spend some time together later," I suggested.

“Really?! Will you really do that?” she asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

Kasugano Yuno looked really happy, and I felt kind of proud because she looked like all the stress that had accumulated in her had vanished at once.

She seemed nervous about not seeing a new vision, but looking into the future or the Dark World was difficult.

She had obtained the ability to share the scenes she had already seen with more people, but the interval between her visions was random.

However, I was happy about the fact that the interval was shortening, the stronger she became, and I was convinced that was the reason she had been training desperately to become even stronger.

Of course, she was also training to spend more time with me, and this was the result of her hard work.

‘In some ways, I feel bad for her… She only lives for the light.’

I knew why Kasugano Yuno had turned out this way, but I had to look away.

Anyway, I headed outside after my business in the underground prison.

I was sure Jo Hye-Jin was curious, but she didn’t ask any questions.

I wanted to applaud her for that.

I liked the fact that she didn’t try to pry into my business.

She definitely thought that protecting me was her only task for the day.

I headed up and passed the summary of the information to Lee Ji-Hye, and then I started preparing for the upcoming expedition.

‘They said that it’s pretty big, so I have to pack many things.’

I didn’t think that it would take long. Perhaps one night and two days or two nights

and three days. At most, it would take us three nights and four days to check every nook and cranny.

While I was packing my bag…

“Are you busy?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked while staring at me with a curious gaze.

CHAPTER 591
KEY PLAYER (2)

“Where are you going?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“…”

I had no idea how to answer him. If I told him that I was going to the site, there was a high chance that he would follow me there, which I wanted to avoid at all costs.

Even I thought that it was kind of strange how I was packing my bag quietly, so it was only natural that he found it weird, but I had no choice but to continue packing.

I took extra clothes, personal supplies, and a compact alchemy kit in case there were things I had to research there. I also packed the chess board in case we had time to relax. It seemed like I was taking a lot of things with me, but the Infinity Bag Kim Hyun-Sung had given to me had a lot of room inside of it.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked at me nervously.

He wasn’t really good at socializing, so he seemed confused about the stance he should take at the moment. He seemed uncertain about whether he should leave or if he should continue staring at me, but I was sure that he wouldn’t say anything.

I finished packing under his gaze, and it seemed that this strange confrontation wasn’t going to end anytime soon.

‘Should I just tell him… ’

I couldn’t just let him keep standing there.

However, Kim Hyun-Sung talked to me first before I could say anything.

“So… I mean… Where are you going?” Kim Hyun-Sung repeated.

‘I’ll answer confidently, and if he tries to follow, I’ll stop him.’

“I’m going to visit the site,” I replied.

“Are you talking about Zone Five?” he asked.

“Yes. I need to see how much they’ve progressed in the restoration work. The damage seemed more serious than I thought… I’ll be taking Deok-Gu and Ha-Yan as well, so you don’t have to worry,” I answered.

“It hasn’t been that long since you got out of the hospital… You should rest more—”

“I’m fine. I don’t have any headaches, and I’m feeling great.” I interrupted him.

‘Since when were you worried about my well-being? Just go and train.’

“But still…”

“It has to be done, just like how you focused on your training for nine months to become even stronger,” I added.

“I’m… s-sorry about that,” he stuttered.

‘Why are you apologizing? You don’t have to apologize for it.’

“It’s fine. You don’t have to apologize because I understand that it’s important,” I told him.

‘You know that your work is just as important as mine, right? So let me just wrap this up.’

“That’s…”

“It’s the same for me. It’s important for me to take responsibility until the end by restoring the site. It’s my mistake, after all,” I said.

“…”

“…”

“I-I understand. When are you coming back?” he asked.

“I’m not sure since I don’t know how long it’ll take, but… it probably won’t be that long,” I replied.

‘At least he’s not offering to come along.’

It seemed that the tension I had built in the beginning was effective.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked like there was a lot he wanted to say, but he was holding back.

I thought that was a good idea because he didn’t have the right to continuously nag about my safety since he wasn’t there when the incident broke out.

I had told him I was taking Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan, so I would at least be safe.

Moreover, he didn’t seem against it, as I was in the same situation as him. He had gone off the grid to fulfill his task, and I had the right to do that as well.

I made sure to sound like I didn’t want him to intervene.

Kim Hyun-Sung had no choice but to accept my decision, albeit hesitantly.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated.

“I told you you don’t have to apologize,” I said.

“…”

“But… what brings you here?” I asked.

“*Ah…*”

‘I’m sure he has a good reason for being here… ’

His expression was definitely different from the usual, and he had to have finally remembered what he came here for because he nodded at me. I had a feeling that it wasn’t good news because of his nervous look.

‘Did something else happen? What could possibly happen in the current situation?’

There was also a chance that it could be nothing. However, it was unlike Kim Hyun-Sung to act all serious, so I couldn't help but feel anxious.

"Please come in and sit," I offered.

He nodded and entered my room.

* * *

"Would you like some tea? Or are you okay with coffee?" I asked.

"I'm fine with anything. More importantly… this may end up being a lengthy conversation…" Kim Hyun-Sung warned.

"It doesn't matter. It may delay the time we head out, but… take your time since it's important," I told him.

'Hurry up and tell me. I'm really curious, man.'

"You see… I'm not sure how to tell you this, but… Do you remember our conversation a long time ago? About the key players…" he asked.

It would be strange if I had already forgotten that, as it was just as important as the threat in our past life.

Obviously, things were progressing differently between the two timelines, but the people with certain talents or special powers didn't change. Just like how Jung Ha-Yan was still overpowered in magic and how the others possessed the same skills as their past lives.

Even if I hadn't approached them, I was sure they would show up in front of me.

I couldn't stress enough just how important they were because the named adventurers were powerful enough to influence any battlefields. They had the power to turn the tides and save just about anyone from any battlefield.

If ordinary soldiers were pawns, the named people were knights or bishops capable of wreaking havoc behind enemy lines. In other words, we would have more useful pieces if we managed to bring them to our side.

And that was exactly why Kim Hyun-Sung and I were so sensitive toward the named adventurers of our past lives.

I had to categorize the named adventurers into different categories, even if they weren't members of the Blue Guild. As for the members of the Blue Guild, I would use extreme measures the moment I noticed that their growth had plateaued.

The joint training, the unnamed small villages, Lindel, the construction sites, and the dungeons were there to help the named adventurers. I was just patiently waiting for them to become even stronger.

Some of them were people Kim Hyun-Sung had encountered, while others were people he had even worked with at least once. Of course, there were enemies he once fought, and he had also heard of many powerful people throughout the continent as well as geniuses who failed to reach their full potential due to premature death.

'But why are they… '

"…"

'I thought there weren't any issues with them… '

I couldn't remember any issues with them. Actually, I did a concept validation because their growth rate was satisfactory. When it came to the light, they were just as loyal as the priests of the Democratic Country.

"I think there's a slight problem," he continued.

"A problem?" I asked.

"The warrior chosen by the holy sword," he said.

Now that I thought about it…

"It's already that time…" I commented.

"Yes."

'Yeah, I was waiting for that bastard as well.'

Among the key players, he was one of the real heroes who was categorized as an SSS Class warrior. He was a powerful warrior on the same level as Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, and Cha Hee-Ra.

He was another cheat character who had been chosen by the holy sword, and he was capable of wielding cataclysmic power.

The holy sword lost its light under the machinations of the masked scum Jin Cheong. He went mad, which drove him to his death. Anyway, the chosen warrior whom Kim Hyun-Sung had described was a necessary card to our plan.

The chosen warrior was so strong that Kim Hyun-Sung had even suggested we let him take care of the entire northwest area. I seemed to have forgotten him until Kim Hyun-Sung mentioned him, but my acknowledgment of him remained the same.

“Has the tutorial dungeon already opened?” I asked.

“Yes,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“That’s good. I actually wanted to see him. I’m curious about his sword and the so-called holy sword. He might even break our record for clearing the tutorial dungeon. He has probably exited the tutorial dungeon with the holy sword…

”Actually, shouldn’t we try to make contact with him instead of talking like this? Managing others from afar is fine, but since he’s important, we should personally—”

“He wasn’t there,” he interrupted.

“What?”

“I couldn’t find his name on the list of tutorial dungeon survivors,” he replied.

“*Huh?*”

‘Shit. What the hell is going on? Damn it.’

“Maybe you were mistaken. What if he’s in the next one—”

“I’m sure I didn’t see his name,” he said, interrupting me.

'Yeah, there's no way you would make that kind of a mistake.'

Kim Hyun-Sung had heard of him, so there was no way the former would forget about him.

'I'm sure it was a shocking incident.'

Rumors spread fast and far, so Kim Hyun-Sung probably heard of him through the rumors. In addition, our lovely regressor had already set his sights on the chosen warrior and Jung Ha-Yan the moment he had regressed.

In other words, there was no way he would mistake the chosen warrior for someone else unless he was an idiot.

'But why wasn't he on the list?'

I was sure that was what Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to ask me.

'Damn, looks like this is going to give me a headache.'

I wondered if the chaotic scene I had seen with Kasugano Yuno happened because of this turn of events. The restoration work at Zone Five was still a mess, but I had already received such a piece of bad news.

I probably had to change my plans completely because Kim Hyun-Sung's revelation was just that serious. Just like how I couldn't imagine Jung Ha-Yan not fighting on the front lines, I also couldn't imagine the chosen warrior missing from the front lines.

The news was so absurd that I would have been more convinced if Kim Hyun-Sung had told me that the chosen warrior died in another dungeon after exiting the tutorial dungeon. After all, the tutorial dungeon was unaffected by butterfly effects, and that was exactly why I was so surprised.

"Are you sure you weren't mistaken?" I asked again.

"Yes, I'm sure of it," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

"*Whoo*… I'm not sure what to say about this… I think it's best if we change our plans for now. He might appear later, so ask someone to keep an eye out near the tutorial dungeon. I'll personally look into it and find out exactly what happened," I told him.

I was convinced that Benigoa knew about what happened because the chosen warrior was a warrior chosen by the gods and the holy sword.

Benigoa was definitely involved.

'I'm feeling nervous.'

The incompetent goddess had never done anything beneficial to the continent.

'What's going on? You're supposed to lay down the holy sword, so why is that damn warrior not showing up?'

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[I'm sorry, my lovely follower, Lee Ki-Young. (0/1)]

'What are you sorry about, damn it… '

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[The plan to train the chosen warrior of the holy sword… was c-canceled due to the lack of funds. (0/1)]

'…'

It was the butterfly effect of Benigoa's bankruptcy.

CHAPTER 592
KEY PLAYER (3)

'What the hell are you talking about? How could you completely cancel a plan? You crazy bitches and bastards. What are you talking about, damn it?!'

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[I'm sorry, my follower, L-Lee Ki-Young, but we had no other choice. We had to update the new dungeons, and we had to use our holy power on many things. I'm sure you already know, but I borrowed some holy power not long after I recovered from bankruptcy. I didn't have enough holy power. You know how much holy power is required to affect the continent, right? (0/1)]

'It's not that I don't know that, but this isn't right. Why did you not tell me about it? You knew I was waiting, but you turned everything to shit.'

[No, i-it's not like that, my lovely Lee Ki-Young. I really didn't know. I-I kept telling myself that I had to tell you, but I couldn't find the time… I was busy trying to fix the problems, and I still haven't completely fixed the 27th Legion summoning incident… My holy power is focused on that right now… (0/1)]

'Is that all the excuse you can give me? The great Goddess Benigoa? I don't know how much holy power is required to train that warrior, but you shouldn't cancel the training like this. What exactly is going on up there that you guys are struggling like this? If you have funds to invest, you should invest.

'Shouldn't there be a manual about how you should handle your funds in accordance with your long-term plans and how to take care of any variables that pop up later down the road? Actually, shouldn't you decide where exactly you should invest your holy power? Are you just updating the dungeons and playing dumb?'

[That's… (0/1)]

'Do you guys even have meetings? I'm sure if we got some neighborhood kids and gave them your jobs, they would do a lot better than you guys. Shit, shit, shit! You should be

investing in things that are worth the investment, and you should have asked if you have no idea which things are worth the investment.

'Damn it… damn it. I'm really getting tired of you. This isn't right. I recall getting a good amount of holy power for you. This wouldn't have happened unless you went somewhere nice and spent those holy powers on yourself. I'm asking just to make sure, but you didn't spend it on something useless, right, Goddess Benigoa?'

[Of course not! That's not what happened, Father Lee Ki-Young. That's definitely not it… And please don't say s-shocking things like you're getting tired of me… I-It makes me nervous. You know how much I love and cherish you, right? You know that as well. You're the only one I can rely on, Father Lee Ki-Young… So stop thinking about strange things and… let's calmly… (0/1)]

'Would you be able to calm down if you were in my shoes? It'd be better to summon Belial again.'

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[W-we really had no other choice… Doing things that affect the continent r-really consumes a lot more holy power t-than you think… We have long-term plans as well. I'm not blaming you, but changing your job to the Alchemist of Light… and… the incidents that occurred up until now were the reasons we don't have enough holy power… Our long-term plan fell apart because there were too many variables, and we ran out of holy power… (0/1)]

'Now you're blaming me? Belial also gave me a Semi-Mythic rank job, Goddess Benigoa.'

[Belial and I are in completely different… positions. Because of that incident… (0/1)]

'Keep going. At this rate, I'm going to stop working with you.'

[…(0/1)]

'…'

[H-Honestly… I shouldn't be saying this, but… (0/1)]

'…'

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[E-Elune made a huge mistake, and we got implicated. I really didn't want to do this, but… *Whoo*… (0/1)]

[A rare-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Benigoa… What are you… doing? (0/1)]

[The rare-ranked Forced Quest has been canceled due to an unknown reason.]

[I'm sure Father Lee Ki-Young will understand that we're not perfect either… He knows this very well. Among the gods, Elune causes the most problems, and it's becoming an issue for us. To be honest, the reason the warrior training plan was canceled was that… Elune's personal project didn't work out. We had to clean up after his mess. (0/1)]

'…'

[We know that the warrior training plan was important… I know it as well. However, the balance of the continent would have been destroyed if we hadn't handled the issue that Elune made. It was heading to the road of no return… As the one in charge, I couldn't just stand by and watch. You also have experience managing humans, so I'm sure you… I'm sure you understand what I'm saying. (0/1)]

'…'

[We've already made a decision that we're going to give Elune a reasonable punishment, but… I'm sure that won't make you feel better… You already know that Elune is a bit… (0/1)]

'Elune is a scum… '

[Yeah… Elune is a scum. Do you think I'm not having a hard time? And Elune is my junior… so I can't just ignore his predicament… Elune acts a bit too much at times, but he's honorable. He stabilized the elves as well… (0/1)]

'So… '

[I'd like to get rid of Elune completely, but that's a bit harsh, and I can't actually get

rid of him… Of course, if you want, I can give Elune the worst possible punishment, but things will become chaotic if I were to do that. Personally, Elune is a junior I cherish, and I know I shouldn't be doing this, but… (0/1)]

'Whoo… '

[The only thing I can tell you is that… I'm sorry. *Kgh*… I'm sorry… I'm really sorry, Father Lee Ki-Young. (0/1)]

I grabbed my head in pain and frustration. I knew Elune would cause trouble one day.

It seemed that the wise man was right when he said that whenever five people gathered, one of them would be garbage. It seemed the saying was applicable up there as well, and Elune was the garbage.

'Yeah, there's no way she'd be this reckless if she could help it.'

Benigoa was incompetent, but she wasn't *that* incompetent.

She was a senior goddess, and her juniors trusted her a lot.

Of course, I would summon her from time to time, which made her seem as if she were a pushover.

However, she would always take the lead in fixing things whenever an issue popped up.

In other words, this incident happened not because Benigoa was incompetent. There was no way she would waste the holy power I had gotten for her.

I had a bit of trust in her, so… fuck—I couldn't be that incompetent.

I was sure that this was also a massive curveball for her, and just like how I fixed Jung Ha-Yan and the revolutionary sibling's problems, it was possible that Benigoa was running around trying to fix the problem that Elune had caused.

I felt like I could relate to her.

'I couldn't do anything about my situation, but… You shouldn't get swayed so easily,

Goddess Benigoa.'

[Do you… understand me, my lovely follower, Lee Ki-Young? (0/1)]

'Be more firm and don't let your emotions drive you. If you're going to take the brunt of the penalties, you should earn a profit that matches that penalty at the very least.

'The way I see it, that Elune scum can't give you anything. The only thing Elune has is the fact that the elves are frequently sending him holy power.

[*Hm…* I understand what you're saying, Father Lee Ki-Young. I'll keep that in mind. (0/1)]

'You must become resolute. From now on, you must exclude Elune from all tasks. The others don't matter, but… the smallest variable can ruin the current situation, and I'm sure you already know that. I don't want things to get chaotic because Elune scum is trying to do something to make up for his mistake. Don't give Elune any tasks. Do you understand?'

[Yeah, I'll do that from now on. I'm going to follow your advice because everything you've told me has been constructive. (0/1)]

'I'm telling you that your top priority should be the current situation. Ah… Elune, that scum… seriously.'

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Elune said that he's really reflecting on his actions… (0/1)]

'From now on. Exclude Elune from all tasks—exclude him completely.'

[B-But that's… (0/1)]

'People who aren't good at their jobs would end up wanting to do something while snooping around. Should I be more straightforward? Fire Elune. If I catch that scum doing something stupid, I'm going to take everyone to hell, the continent be damned.'

[I'll… do that. (0/1)]

'I also want you to think about what you're going to do afterward. I'll see if there's

something else I can do within my power.'

[An average-ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Okay… We've actually been having meetings all day and night to figure out which direction we should take. We'll do our best… so that we can deliver good news to you soon. T-Thanks for believing in me, my lovely light and the continent's only hope, Lee Ki-Young. (0/1)]

'Whoo… shit.'

The silence was kind of long, and I was still holding my head in frustration.

Benigoa had told me that she would do her best to deliver good news to me soon, but the best news in this situation would be discovering the chosen warrior in the tutorial dungeon.

It had been a while since I was this bummed out.

I was also not sure what I could do to fill the chosen warrior's seat.

'Damn it.'

There was no way. It was like trying to replace Jung Ha-Yan or Kim Hyun-Sung.

'The warrior… ' I wasn't sure, but what if he died in the tutorial dungeon? *'I feel bad for that bastard.'*

The chosen warrior, whose fate was predetermined, failed to obtain the holy sword because of Elune's mistake and ended up dying in the tutorial dungeon.

I wasn't sure how he died, but I wasn't that curious. After all, he would stay dead, even if we managed to find out whether he was murdered by someone else or was killed by the Agwis.

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"…"

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"…"

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"Yes?" I answered.

"Are you okay? Y-You suddenly…" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. I was just thinking about something else… You don't have to worry. What were we talking about again?" I asked.

"We were talking about looking for another way…" he answered.

"…"

"*Ah,* right. I apologize," I said.

"Are you really okay?" he asked.

"…"

"…"

"Excuse me, Mr. Ki-Young," he called out.

"Yes?" I replied.

"Well… *Um*… Well…" he mumbled.

"What is it?" I asked.

"No… It's… It's nothing," he answered. Kim Hyun-Sung bit his lips, and his arms quivered ever so slightly. I could see fury on his face.

'That's right, Hyung-Sung. I'm sure you're angry as well. I understand.'

It seemed that the kind-hearted Kim Hyun-Sung was also furious about this indescribable situation.

CHAPTER 593
KEY PLAYER (4)

Kim Hyun-Sung had never really been the type to show his emotions, but I managed to see through his emotions, albeit briefly. I stared at him in surprise, and he smiled sheepishly as if he was more surprised than me.

He was forcing himself to smile to reassure me. He had failed to hide his emotions, but it wasn't because of me. Of course, it wasn't really strange that he failed to conceal his feelings, and if I were in his shoes, I would have been unable to remain calm as well.

After all, that scum Elune had actually messed up our plan behind our backs.

'Man, what should I do?'

I had no answer.

I was sure we would have more options if I were to tell Kim Hyun-Sung about what was happening up there, but I couldn't do that. It seemed that the best choice that we could take at the moment was to buy time and keep an eye out. It was the most urgent matter, but I had to take care of the site first.

The northwest the chosen warrior was supposed to handle was a problem, but Zone Five had problems as well. I was sure I hadn't done anything wrong, but there were problems everywhere, which made me feel frustrated.

"I think it's best if you head to the tutorial dungeon for now, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I'll join you as soon as I take care of things here, so please check the dungeon yourself as well as the trainees," I requested.

"Mr. Ki-Young, I've been thinking about this, and I think it's best if we move—"

'No, I don't want that.'

"I'd like to do that as well, but we don't have time. You should do the things that only

you can handle. I understand why you're worried, but you really don't have to worry. I've already made my decision. I would have normally followed your suggestion, but I'd appreciate it if you could follow mine this time," I asked him.

"But…"

"Let's get up. I don't think we're going to find the solution by sitting here. As for how we should proceed, I think it's best if we discuss it later after taking care of the current situation. It's not something we can just overlook.

"If you're sure that the warrior really didn't exit the dungeon, strengthening the defense of the northwest region is the only thing we can do at the moment. I'll take care of reinforcing that region, so—"

"…"

"…"

"I'll take care of that." Kim Hyun-Sung interrupted.

"What?" I asked.

"Aside from finding out just what exactly happened in the tutorial dungeon, I have nothing else to do, so I'll take care of that," he said.

"…"

'Hm, I wonder if this will be okay. Can he do it?'

"If possible, I'd like to come with you, but… since you don't want me to… I'll take care of everything before you return, so don't overdo it and don't worry about me," he added.

"*Ah…*"

'It's not that I don't trust you, but… you can really do this, right?'

I felt anxious about assigning that job to him.

It wasn't the best example, but it was like the husband—who had never done

housework—was telling his wife to go out and leave the housework to him. I was nervous, and I was actually worried that he might make a mess.

Unfortunately, I couldn't say anything because it was admirable how he took the initiative to lend a helping hand. I also couldn't just decline his offer, and more importantly, if I declined…

'It'll become really awkward between us.'

If it would put Kim Hyun-Sung at ease, then I had to allow it.

"I'd be grateful if you could do that for me. Miss Kim Mi-Young already knows about the situation pretty well, so you can contact her directly. You can take care of the region with her," I informed him.

"I'll do that," he said.

'My mind will be at ease as well since Kim Mi-Young will be working closely with Kim Hyun-Sung.'

"I actually feel bad that you're offering to help me," I commented.

"I should have done this long ago. More importantly… Mr. Ki-Young, I'm really sorry for asking this multiple times, but…" he paused.

"Yes?"

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked.

"…"

"…"

"Yes. As I've mentioned before, I'm feeling great, so you really don't have to worry. I'll head out first," I told him.

I smiled as I stood up to show him that I was really fine, but he still looked sad.

'What's wrong with you? Did something happen?'

For some reason, Kim Hyun-Sung looked sad. I thought perhaps it was just me who thought that way, but it seemed that he had misunderstood something here. I realized that it had to be the case because Jo Hye-Jin was making the same face as him.

'Damn it, Hyun-Sung… What the hell did you say to her?'

From what I could remember, Jo Hye-Jin had never looked at me so warmly.

"I'm sorry for being late," Jo Hye-Jin said.

'You came because Hyun-Sung called you here.'

She said she was going to go to the bathroom before leaving, but her overjoyed look made it obvious that Kim Hyun-Sung had summoned her here.

It was difficult for me to pretend that I didn't notice that. I wasn't sure what she heard, but she looked completely different from earlier when she was checking her equipment nonchalantly. She was obviously worried about me.

"Stop staring at me. Others will misunderstand," I told her.

"It's not like that. Anyway… I'm sorry for being late," Jo Hye-Jin repeated.

"You needed to go to the bathroom, so there's no need to apologize. I'm also the type who feels uncomfortable unless I use the bathroom before an expedition. I thought I wouldn't have much in common with Hye-Jin noonim, but it seems that we have that quirk in common, at the very least.

"Anyway, it's been a while since we traveled with you, hyung-nim, so I'm kind of excited. Don't you agree, noonim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Y-Yes, I-I like it as well," Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"It's not like we're going to have fun… but the expedition isn't that dangerous either… Anyway, I don't know why, but I keep thinking about the past," Park Deok-Gu commented.

"Something dangerous might happen… so don't put your guard down. Our job is to protect the sub guild master and the rearguards. I understand that you're excited,

but an accident might happen…" Jo Hye-Jin warned.

"Hey, I know. That's obvious. I'll save hyung-nim, even if I have to sacrifice my life, so don't worry, everyone. You too, hyung-nim. The same thing won't happen again," he said.

"I'm sure nothing will happen," I commented.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Of course, it's highly likely that nothing will happen. Deok-Gu, the reason I included you, and Miss Hye-Jin was in case something unexpected happens. It's not because I *expect* something to happen. There's a chance that the remaining members of the organization are still there, but Ha-Yan, Miss Sora, and Miss Kasugano Yuno should be enough to deal with them… Anyway, let's get going. Ha-Yan, the spell," I ordered.

"O-Okay. I'll start channeling, so please step on the magic circle," she said.

'This is pretty handy.'

It wasn't as lively as before when we would leave for an expedition by riding a carriage and talking on the way to our destination. However, Jung Ha-Yan's spell allowed us to move pretty fast, which ultimately made things more comfortable.

The members of the expedition followed Jung Ha-Yan's instructions and stepped on the magic circle. It was a small party made up of Park Deok-Gu, Jo Hye-Jin, Jung Ha-Yan, Han Sora, Kasugano Yuno, and a few of the bodyguards, but it wasn't a weak party.

They were too strong to be cleaning up other people's mess, but this expedition was extremely important.

'That place is a world of its own.'

I wasn't sure if Han Sora was aware of the fact that this was going to be a big gift for her, but she seemed frightened about going underground with a certain *someone*.

She started biting her fingers upon seeing that Jung Ha-Yan was in a good mood, which made me realize that she had truly become a Jung Ha-Yan expert at this point.

"…!"

Flash!

I was enveloped in a bright light while thinking about many things. My vision shifted, and I felt weightless as I was whisked away somewhere else.

'It's really amazing.'

My appreciation for Jung Ha-Yan's magic didn't last long because I saw Zone Five in complete ruin. I knew I would see such a sight, but it was a lot worse than I thought.

The destruction broke my heart. At this point, I thought building the wall from scratch would be faster than repairing it. I started to feel depressed while staring at the ruins.

"*Sigh…*"

'This is going to take at least a year.'

Zone Five was still constructing the wall when it was destroyed. They were almost done building it, and the Committee had calculated that it would have only taken them three to six months to complete the wall.

Unfortunately, it seemed that we might have to start over. I wanted to dispatch the soldiers here after the construction, so I felt sad to see the ruins. Jung Ha-Yan probably didn't know how I was feeling because she was all smiles. I knew that there was no need for me to resent her, but I wanted to shake her hand off of me.

"I received news that you would arrive, sir."

"You're…"

'One of Ji-Hye noona's men.'

"I was worried that you wouldn't arrive on time, but it seems that I was mistaken. I'll lead the way, sir," the guide offered.

"Okay."

“As we’ve mentioned before, we found an entrance that is connected to an underground area beneath the building. We thought it would take us some time to enter it since we were told that someone had cast a spell on it, but the active spell seemed to have vanished the moment the wall collapsed,” he explained.

“*Hm…* Is that so?” I asked.

“Yes, and it was difficult for us to find the right path because there were many tricks and traps aside from magic spells. We found doors behind closets, and things are encrypted as well.

”We reckon that only the members of the organization know the layout of the place. The designer probably spent a lot of time planning the layout. It’s a well-designed dungeon,” he answered.

“Well, you’re not exactly wrong. Those demon contractors had been using it, so it’s technically a dungeon,” Park Deok-Gu chimed in.

‘You can definitely call this a dungeon.’

The only difference between this place and a dungeon was that humans had created it, and we didn’t need to clear it. In other words, we were like an expedition team reaping the rewards of a dungeon that another party had already cleared.

‘I do feel better after thinking that way.’

I wasn’t sure how much we would get out of this, but I was hoping that we would gain more than we lost. We had to get something out of this place. Benigoa’s chosen warrior project had been abandoned, so we had nothing else to rely on but this.

We soon stumbled upon a large space.

“We actually haven’t entered it. We wanted to see if the place was safe, but Miss Lee Ji-Hye…” he paused.

“I understand. Thank you… for your hard work,” I said.

“I was just doing my job,” he said.

“That’s not true. I won’t forget all the hard work you’ve put in here. I’ll notify Miss Ji-

Hye," I told them.

"Thank you."

The guide bowed and left.

'I'd expect nothing less from Ji-Hye noona.'

The guide seemed loyal. I was sure Lee Ji-Hye had a lot on her plate to the point that she had to have been unable to even rest these days, so I wondered where she got the time to train people.

I looked at the guide using Mind's Eye and saw that he was a pretty skilled adventurer.

'But that's not important right now.'

I looked around while tapping my thigh with my finger, and I noticed that the party members were a bit nervous. Park Deok-Gu and Jo Hye-Jin especially looked on edge, and Han Sora was sending me signals with her eyes.

'I think she can feel something.'

If I had taken on Doom Ki-Young's form, I would've felt something as well. The quick-witted Jung Ha-Yan noticed the signals that Han Sora was sending at me, so she stared at Han Sora.

Fortunately, it seemed that there weren't any other problems aside from Han Sora's concern.

"Let's head inside," I said.

Park Deok-Gu nodded and took the lead.

Our jaws dropped at the sight that unfolded before us.

CHAPTER 594
THE ERASER IN MY HEAD (1)

It was kind of dark, but the room was neat and organized.

It was more like a lab than a dungeon, and I nodded as I looked around the room.

'Looks like we'll get a lot more than I thought.'

I thought perhaps there wouldn't be much left for us to take from here, but it didn't seem to be the case. The place was a lot bigger than I thought. I still had to look around, but my Mind's Eye had already seen many useful things, such as catalysts and research journals.

There were also artifacts made with black magic, and there were even traces of monster experiments. The artifacts were in many different ranks, but it was interesting to see so many Epic-rank items here.

'Maybe it's not that strange… '

Those ordinary couldn't possibly summon a demon capable of commanding other demons. Belial was a rare case, so there was a huge chance that they didn't manage to summon a high priest.

I reckoned that their research was the primary reason why they managed to summon a demon. Of course, their negative emotions, inferiority complex, and an obsession that was borderline madness had definitely played a part.

However, if people were capable of summoning such a strong demon with those things alone, demons would have long conquered the continent.

'I guess they're just talented?'

They had succeeded, after all.

The majority of the party members were surprised as they looked around. I was sure

that they didn't expect this place to be *this big.*

"This is surprising. I knew there was going to be something down here, but it's bigger than I thought. They say that one year is enough for mountains and rivers to change, but this is just jaw-dropping," said Park Deok-Gu.

"You mean a decade?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter even if it's a decade or a year; what matters is how you use that time. Geez, hyung-nim, let's just move on since it's not important… Honestly, I don't really know much, so I can't really say much, but we can say that their plans truly run deep. What do you see, hyung-nim?" he asked.

"I'm seeing the same things as you. I can't believe they made all this in such a short amount of time," I replied.

"It was probably all prepared. They probably continued their research here," Kasugano Yuno chimed in.

"I think the shaman is right… I knew I had a knack for seeing things. Based on what I'm seeing here, I don't think there's anything worth looking at here. What should we do? Should we continue moving?" he asked.

"Yeah, but don't put your guard down. I think it's best if we take a look at each of the rooms… Anyway, let's keep moving, and I'm telling all of you this just in case, but don't touch anything. I'll check everything myself. If you see anything out of the ordinary, report it to me right away… I would like the two ranged members to start scouting nearby. If you find anything dangerous, don't fight it. Report it to me right away," I ordered.

"Okay."

"All right."

"What are you doing? Let's keep moving. I'd like to take a look at all the areas up to this point before noon. Let's start with the room on the right, Deok-Gu," I told him.

Park Deok-Gu nodded and entered the room first with his shield in front of him. Clusters of light enveloped him, which meant that he was prepared to respond at any time.

Fortunately, there weren't any problems.

No, the problem was that the vanguards had nothing to do.

"I don't think there's anything here, so you can come in and start working. Hurry up and come in. I see a lot of interesting items. I don't know anything about black magic, so I don't know their purpose, but I can tell there are many valuable items in here," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Miss Sora," I signaled.

"Yes, Sub Guild Master," Han Sora answered.

"Check and see if there's anything useful," I instructed.

"Okay."

"Miss Kasugano Yuno, let me know right away if anything comes to your mind," I told her.

"Sure."

I joined the treasure hunt afterward. The way Jo Hye-Jin looked at me kind of bothered me, but she didn't seem all that interested.

Han Sora looked around with wide eyes. I felt like she was looking at me as if she was asking me if this was really okay, so I had no choice but to nod at her. Meanwhile, Jung Ha-Yan looked like she was in a bad mood, and it was probably because of the 27th Legion incident.

'Wait, I actually forgot that.'

She had summoned Belial twice, so I wasn't sure why she was looking around while pouting.

Based on her temper, I deduced that she probably wanted to burn this place down because the thought of Rimoura and Lonovera alone was enough to keep her up at night.

"Tell me right away if you find something," I instructed.

“O-Okay. I-I’ll report it to you, so don’t worry,” Jung Ha-Yan responded.

‘Don’t throw it away. All of this is valuable… ’

The majority of them couldn’t be used right away, but there were rare-looking books as well as worthless items.

[Principles of Mid-Rank Demon Contract Execution - Rare Rank]

[Precautions About Advanced Demon Contract - Rare Rank]

‘These aren’t very useful.’

[How the Plaguelord and the Genius Swordsman Loves - Legendary Rank]

‘Wait, why is this here? What the hell?’

[Introduction to Black Magic - Epic Rank]

‘I think this is worth taking.’

[72 Legions Instruction Manual - Legendary Rank]

‘This is better than the book I found earlier.’

“I-I think the majority of the items here are books. I think this was a reference room that they used like a library,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“I agree,” I said.

“There’s a lot of data, but t-they seem useless…” she stuttered.

‘They’re useful at training black mages. They aren’t that bad.’

The spells’ range was enough to hit pigeons in the sky, but the great power it granted upon the black mages in the early stages meant that the black mages’ foundations would be shaky, but it wasn’t that bad.

I was sure Han Sora would stay with us—even though she had been wanting to be transferred away—if I told her that I would give all of this to her. She might even produce results, even if it meant putting her life on the line.

I glanced over at Han Sora, and she seemed startled as she hurriedly looked away. I felt kind of bad because she seemed self-conscious about how Jung Ha-Yan was sticking close to me, but that was all I felt.

Anyway, the expedition continued. Aside from the chimera that we encountered in the bio lab, there weren’t any issues. The scouts returned and reported that they didn’t find anything dangerous, so the wariness level of the party went down to level two, which meant that our investigation progressed even faster.

We found a magic circle lab that had data about magic circles, and there was a lab full of potions and physical enhancement serums made using black magic. There were many useful things, but what caught my attention the most was the bio lab.

‘Chimera.’

Chimeras were created by black magic.

They weren’t alchemists, but it seemed that they researched homunculus as well.

‘During the ambush… ’

They didn’t use any of these, so they probably didn’t have that much progress.

'This is a completely different issue from demon summoning.'

I was sure they saw the potential in the research, but creating artificial life wasn't that easy. I had only heard of homunculi through rumors, so I was sure that they had to have been having a hard time making any progress.

In the end, they definitely changed the direction of their research. Their funds were limited, after all, so they had no choice but to postpone the research that hadn't been able to give them results.

'So this is where all my money went. Shit, I'm thankful to these guys.'

I wasn't any different from them.

They did a lot of research at the same time, but they completely postponed the homunculus and chimera research. Administrative tasks and their main research had definitely kept them busy, so they probably couldn't focus on so much research at once.

However, they had done enough research.

"I think I can use this," I mumbled.

"W-What did you say…" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"It's nothing, Ha-Yan. I was just talking to myself," I replied.

"Okay."

It was kind of late, but my mood improved at the good news. They didn't make any progress in this research, but the data and information that they had gathered weren't going anywhere.

I could immediately use these facilities and research materials to conduct my own experiments. I had a Semi-Mythic job related to all this, so I couldn't help but think that perhaps I could take advantage of everything here.

'This is great. No, it's more like I hit the jackpot.'

I looked serious, but I was doing my best to prevent my lips from going up.

This room alone was a huge profit for me. If I could, I would spend at least six months in this room. The funds that those reactionary bastards had embezzled broke my heart, but if I thought of it as paying them for their research, I figured it was definitely worth spending that much gold.

'I want to look more closely into this… '

I really felt like living here.

Jo Hye-Jin was staring intently at me, which was unlike her usual self.

If she weren't here, I would have already performed a simple experiment.

'She should just focus on her job. Why is she looking at me?'

"I think we're done here, so let's leave," I suggested.

"Okay."

'I need time to myself. I want to look more into it. I think it won't be that difficult for me to make an excuse.'

I quickly cooked up a simple plan.

"I'm going to head to the bio lab real quick. I forgot something there. I'll join you as soon as I'm done," I said.

"I'll be with you," Park Deok-Gu suggested.

'Don't follow me, you pig.'

"There's no need. It's not that far, and… I would like you and Miss Hye-Jin to continue with the others. The bodyguards are in the hallway, so if something happens, I'm sure they can handle it," I instructed.

"But still…"

"You confirmed yourself that there's nothing here. I would have already returned by now if it weren't for your nagging. Anyway, I'll be quick. Miss Hye-Jin, please guide the party members, Miss Hye-Jin," I requested.

It was better not to hear her answer.

I immediately walked away and entered the room, I started having fun looking through the documents I couldn't examine earlier because of the others.

I didn't really like the actual research, and I also didn't think that I had talent in this field, but my heart started to race.

I felt like a part of me fit right in with this place.

I took a seat and opened the results of the forbidden experiment.

"How long has it been?"

A disappointed-sounding voice echoed behind me, and I froze.

'Jo Hye-Jin? She's following me?'

I started to get nervous about the idea that Jo Hye-Jin had become suspicious of me, but I heard something completely random.

"When did you start losing your memories?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"…"

"…"

'What the hell is she talking about?'

I wanted to ask her what the hell was going on and where she was going with that question.

CHAPTER 595
THE ERASER IN MY HEAD (2)

“I don’t really understand what you’re saying…” I said

“…”

Jo Hye-Jin appeared out of nowhere and asked when did I start losing my memories. I really had no idea what she was talking about. I looked at Jo Hye-Jin with a flustered face, and her expression turned even more serious.

‘Why is she so serious?’

I started wondering whether she was playing a game or was doing a hidden camera prank, but she was the type that would react seriously even to cheesy jokes, so she probably wasn’t joking around here. More importantly, her serious expression bothered me, as it meant that she was genuinely worried about me.

I immediately realized that something was wrong, but I couldn’t say anything because I was so shocked by the sudden turn of events. However, she seemed happy about the idea that she was right.

“There’s no need to hide it, Sub Guild Master,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“Wait…”

‘Shit, I really don’t know what she’s talking about.’

“When did the symptoms appear?” she asked.

“I really don’t understand what you’re talking about… I think you’re misunderstanding something here. Anyway, it’s nothing serious, so let’s just move on. Don’t you think it’s ridiculous to say that I lost my memories when I just forgot a few things? Go back to the party and carry on with your work instead of saying absurd things like that…” I told her.

“Sub Guild Master, just a moment ago, you were reading *that* research journal. Were you already aware?” she asked.

‘I know that… so what are you talking about?’

“No, I just wanted to take a look at it again,” I replied.

I waved my hand to signal her to get out, but Jo Hye-Jin remained unmoving and quiet. It was as if she was telling me that she wasn’t going to budge until I told her the truth.

‘Damn it… What’s going on? Is it because of Doom Ki-Young?’

The guild members were aware that I would suffer mentally whenever I transformed to Doom Ki-Young, so short-term memory loss was expected, and it was something I had designed myself when I first transformed.

Losing memories of the subconscious world and becoming Doom Ki-Young were just the foundations I had established, but I made sure not to show any of those symptoms in my subsequent transformations.

I made sure to show them that the penalties were decreasing due to the goddess’ blessing, and the end goal was to show them that Doom Ki-Young could be helpful. The party members didn’t seem suspicious of Benigoa’s radiant light, and nothing really happened during the one year when we promised to keep an eye on Doom Ki-Young.

I transformed once recently, but I was sure I hadn’t done anything serious worthy of being questioned. Of course, there were times when I frowned and grabbed my head out of pain, and I also used the memory loss card to avoid answering difficult questions.

I did use those cards pretty often, but I didn’t expect Jo Hye-Jin to treat me as someone who had been losing his memories.

“I heard it from the guild master,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

‘Why did you do that, Hyun-Sung? Why are you being so serious? What the hell were you thinking about?’

I finally understood why Jo Hye-Jin looked sad after visiting Kim Hyun-Sung.

I glanced at her and saw that she was still staring intently at me. I couldn't understand how Kim Hyun-Sung reached that conclusion. The only thing that bothered me was our recent conversation.

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"Yes?" I answered.

"Are you okay? Y-You suddenly…" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. I was just thinking about something else… You don't have to worry. What were we talking about again?" I asked.

"We were talking about looking for another way…" he answered.

"…"

"Ah, right. I apologize," I said.

"Are you really okay?" he asked.

I was convinced that the fact I had spaced out while talking to him because I was talking to Benigoa was one of the reasons he had reached that kind of conclusion. Kim Hyun-Sung pretended like he was fine, but the fact that I had lost my memories of the subconscious world seemed to have disturbed him a lot.

I also remembered telling him that I couldn't remember seeing him when he asked me if I could still remember our adventure in his subconscious world. This was nothing more than just an assumption, but I was convinced that it was the case.

What if the fact that I had pretended like I had lost that chunk of memories led to him writing a novel better than Shakespeare's works? Nonetheless, it was my fault. I should have been more careful, but who could have expected this turn of events?

I didn't expect him to carve my response to his mind.

Of course, he was probably doubtful about his assumptions, and that was probably why he told Jo Hye-Jin to ask me.

Jo Hye-Ji probably asked me that question because there was something bothering her as well. It was understandable because I would frequently lose consciousness, and I had been forgetting things a lot lately.

Anyway, I really wanted to hear how Jo Hye-Jin and Kim Hyun-Sung reached that kind of conclusion.

'Wow, they're really being dramatic about this. You two should become writers.'

Those two had probably seen a lot of tragic cliches. I acknowledged the fact that there had been quite a few shocking incidents recently, but I really couldn't think of anything else that had influenced them to reach such a conclusion aside from those.

"I told you several times that I'm fine, so why do you keep talking about ridiculous things? I'm really fine, so go back and do your job," I told her.

"I already know everything. I thought you've been acting strange recently, but…" Jo Hye-Jin paused.

'I haven't done anything strange, and you don't know anything.'

I wanted to resolve the misunderstanding, but she was in her own world. Actually, I wanted to tell them that my symptoms were getting worse.

'But what do I stand to gain from doing that?'

I was sure that they wouldn't do anything to protect me. After all, it was already happening, so the best thing that they could do was to take care of me both physically and mentally.

I considered the possibility that they could stop me from working, but I didn't think that it would happen. There was already a solution, after all. In addition, they were already aware of what would happen if they were to confine Doom Ki-Young, so I reckoned that they wouldn't do that again.

'How about I tell them that I don't have much time left?'

It was kind of extreme, but it would be effective. Unfortunately, I had no idea just what kind of extreme trouble it would bring, so I had to think twice.

‘But even if I say that nothing’s wrong, I don't think they’re going to believe me.’

Perhaps it would be better to acknowledge it. No matter what I chose to do, they weren’t the best options, so I was having a hard time making a decision. However, I could see a way out of this. In fact, I could actually create a better environment for myself with it.

I glanced at Jo Hye-Jin once more. She was still staring at me from the door. However, it seemed that she was no longer suspicious. She had become certain that something was happening inside my head.

“Sub Guild Master,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“…”

“…”

The room was pervaded with silence, and the atmosphere was so intense that it was palpable. I gulped unknowingly upon seeing Jo Hye-Jin’s sad face.

“Please trust us. The members of the Blue Guild have the right to know what’s going on inside your head,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“…”

“It’s my responsibility,” she added.

“No,” I said.

“What?”

“It’s not your responsibility. The recent incident didn’t change anything,” I told her.

“Really…”

“…”

“…”

“Please don’t tell anyone else,” I said.

"…"

With that, she was fully convinced that something was wrong with me.

"Don't tell Mr. Hyun-Sung, Ha-Yan, Deok-Gu, the members of the Blue Guild, and any of my acquaintances. I don't want them to know. Things are delicate, so I don't want to make them worry about me. I still have things I need to get done. I really need to do them," I requested.

"What… are you… talking about?" she asked.

"I don't have much time left," I answered.

"What the hell are you talking about?" she repeated.

"It is exactly what you think," I replied.

"…"

"I don't know when it started, but my mind has gotten foggier and foggier. The short-term memory loss is getting worse as well. The reason is—Yeah, that's probably it. I tried to find a way, but I was told that there was no other way," I continued.

"Who—"

"Benigoa," I responded.

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Yes. She said it's a type of curse that can't be fixed even with holy power," I answered.

"W-What kind of curse is that?" she stuttered.

"It's not a big deal. It's not like I'm dying. I'm just slowly losing my memories. I'll probably lose all of my memories within three to five years," I informed her.

"What the hell?"

"It's really not that big of a deal, so don't look so sad. I've been enduring it better

than I thought. My high intelligence stat is helping with it. I often space out or faint, but I haven't forgotten the things that happened in the distant past. It hasn't gotten to that point yet," I explained.

"…"

"Don't tell the others. I still have many things to do. I don't know when my condition will worsen, so I want to get everything done before then. Of course, it includes the incident in Zone Five, the Blue Guild, and creating a better place for us to live.

"It's annoying, but there's nothing I can do about it. I was told that I was chosen by the gods. I'm not really the type to sacrifice for others, but the continent must be safe for me to survive as well," I added.

"…"

"It's kind of cheesy for me to say it, but I want everyone with a connection with me to live. That's why I don't want them to worry about me. I might not look it, but I'm a pretty talented person. I have many things I need to get done within the time I've been given. I don't want people to worry about stupid things and waste time," I told her.

"You're really…"

"Don't tell anyone for the time being. Just keep reporting that I'm fine and that I'm healthy. It's my last wish," I requested.

'While you're at it, make things convenient for me. I think this is pretty great.'

I was convinced that Jo Hye-Jin would listen to my request.

We would be stuck here for a few days, so I was sure that not only would she make things convenient for me, but she would definitely make the others less worried about me.

Once this was over, I could just come out and say, *"Ta-da! I found a way. My curse is completely gone!"*

I was sure the guild would also feel relieved if Jo Hye-Jin was with me. In other words, there wouldn't be any need for them to assign additional bodyguards to me.

I would soon get immersed in this lab, so I didn't think that there would be any negative effects, even if I maintained this *condition* for the next two years.

I smiled at the thought of being left alone, but I noticed something strange.

"…"

'Wait, why is she crying?'

"…"

'Why are you crying? You're making me feel bad. Please don't cry.'

CHAPTER 596
THE ERASER IN MY HEAD (3)

I was uneasy.

'She's making me feel bad, too… '

Jo Hye-Jin looked like a mess.

The last time I saw her cry this way was when Kim Hyun-Sung rejected her at the speed of light. She wasn't crying out loud, but her lips and face were trembling. She hurriedly covered her face out of embarrassment, but her shoulders were still trembling.

'Why are you crying? Why are you taking this so seriously? You're not that type of person.'

I made it all up because I thought that it wasn't a bad idea, but I could have imagined that she would take it this seriously. My conscience was hurt. Who could have known that the lie I made up on the spot would make someone cry?

"…"

I felt ashamed of myself, and I felt uncomfortable as the quiet room got quieter. If she were someone else, I wouldn't think much of it, but we were talking about Jo Hye-Jin here, so I felt uneasy about all this.

"Are you crying?" I asked to break the silence.

"…"

"Are you really crying?" I asked.

"Who said I was crying?" Jo Hye-Jin said.

"You're crying right now," I pointed out.

“I didn’t cry, and I’m not crying right now,” she said.

“I think you’re crying,” I teased.

“I said I wasn’t crying! I really wasn’t crying. I didn’t! I didn’t cry. I didn’t cry!” she yelled.

“O-Okay…” I stuttered.

“A-And is that really important right now? How can you make jokes like that in a situation like this? Did you really have to ask?” she grumbled.

“I mean…”

“I knew you were bad at reading the room, but I never knew you were this bad. Do you really want to make stupid jokes right now? How can you even laugh? You’re losing your memories? Your mind is being consumed? How can I not say anything despite knowing that? S-Still… you’re my friend… *Heuk*…” she said.

“…”

“How can I not tell the others… and just stand by and watch? H-How… were you able to… endure that by yourself? How… Why?” she mumbled.

‘Stop being so serious. It’s making things awkward, and you’re making me feel bad.’

I couldn’t tell whether I should pat her shoulder or hug her. I pondered for a moment, but I decided not to do any of those because she probably wouldn’t like it. I thought perhaps staying silent until she calmed down was the best thing to do, as things would probably get worse if I were to do something here.

Fortunately, Jo Hye-Jin soon stopped crying.

Her eyes and nose were red, and she was still trembling, but it seemed that she no longer had any issues talking to me. It seemed that she was ashamed as well because she looked even more flustered than I was just a few moments ago.

Jo Hye-Jin would probably start kicking her blanket out of embarrassment upon remembering what happened today later tonight because seeing her crying was simply *that* rare.

However, it wasn't that bad to see her cry for me.

'It means our Hye-Jin cares that much about me.'

I wanted to give her a thumbs-up.

'Were you that sad? Oh my. Is that why our Hye-Jin cried?'

"I don't know what you're thinking, but I suggest you stop having stupid thoughts while showing that annoying face of yours, Sub Guild Master," Jo Hye-Jin threatened.

"Why are you being so hostile? I'm just thankful that you cried for me upon hearing that your precious friend is in pain," I told her.

"…"

"…"

"*Whoo…*"

"…"

"How long has it been?" she asked.

Her reaction was more serious than I thought, so I wanted to take back everything I said earlier by saying, *"It was all a joke,"* but I couldn't say it. I wasn't that thick-skinned. I didn't have the guts to say something like that in this kind of situation.

'I think it's going to be fine as long as she doesn't find out that it's a lie.'

There was a universal constant that said that the lie was the truth unless it was discovered that it was a lie.

"Aren't you going to answer me?"

"I don't really have anything else to say. I discovered it when I visited Goddess Benigoa. Of course, there weren't any issues at the time. My memories of everything that happened before that had disappeared, but… I just told myself that… it was probably nothing. However, not everything was as great as it seemed," I replied.

"…"

"Symptoms started showing little by little as time went on, but it wasn't a big deal. I would forget what happened just now or have a hard time remembering where my office is located… or I would space out for a moment. It's not that serious to the point that it affects my daily life. At least not yet." I continued.

"How can you say that…" she commented.

"It can't be stopped, anyway. Even if it can be stopped, I'm already beyond the road of no return," I told her.

"I'm sure there's a way. Don't lose hope just because Goddess Benigoa said that you can't be treated anymore," she said.

"I haven't lost hope. Do I look like I've given up everything? You should know me by now. I'm simply prioritizing what I think has to be prioritized. I can't say that I'm not worried about it at all. After all, the knowledge I've accumulated will eventually disappear, and I'm really worried about that.

"Objectively speaking, there's nothing more important than my brain right now, but I can't prioritize that right now. We have to stop the upcoming threat, or everyone will die, so… I can't get comfortable and lie down just to take care of myself.

"Anyway, I'll think of a way, so don't worry too much," I reassured her.

"I wasn't worried…" she commented.

"As I said earlier, please keep this a secret from Mr. Hyun-Sung and the other members," I repeated.

"That's…"

"Please. Looks like Mr. Hyun-Sung gave you hints about me… What exactly did he—"

"He said there were a few things he was suspicious about. He wasn't certain, but he said your condition seemed to have worsened lately… He said that you might be losing your memories or you're having mental issues," she interrupted.

'I knew it.'

“There were a few things that bothered me as well…” she added.

“Tell him that it didn’t seem like a serious problem and that he has misunderstood,” I instructed her.

“Why are you trying to hide it?” she asked.

“What’s so great about being cursed? It’s enough for me to carry the burden by myself, and I’ll take care of it by myself as well. I don’t want people to worry about useless things and sympathize with me,” I replied.

“Still, I think it’s best if everyone knows. Everyone must know, Sub Guild Master,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

‘No, they don’t have to know. I want you to be the only person to know about this. If you’re going to tell everyone, then there’s no point in me bringing this up.’

“I really think that it’s just going to be stressful. People are eventually going to find out, and I don’t want to be stressed about things aside from work in the meantime. Keep it to yourself. Please,” I begged.

“…”

“…”

‘Why are you crying again?’

Jo Hye-Jin lowered her head. I had no idea that she was such a sentimental person.

‘All right, cry all you want, Hye-Jin. Prove to me that you’re still the same naive Jo Hye-Jin that I know… ’

“I’ll… do that for now, but it doesn’t mean that I agree with you. You have to let people know someday. I know you don’t like that kind of attention, but… you can’t keep hiding it from them. Until then… I’ll help you in any way I can,” she said.

“Thank you.”

“There’s no need to thank me. Actually… I should apologize,” she said.

“You don’t have to apologize, Miss Hye-Jin. Think nothing of it. *Ah*, after we finish investigating this region, I’m going to lock myself up in a room for a bit, so keep that in mind,” I told her.

“O-Okay…” she stuttered.

Jo Hye-Jin cried again as if a dam had broken. I was scared to look at her as she wiped her tears with her left hand, but this was necessary for me to conduct my research. My conscience was hurting, but my rational side was screaming with joy about the freedom I would earn with Jo Hye-Jin on my side.

‘It’s been a while since I felt this bad, but I had to do something about her suspicion.’

I had to make a decision, and this was the best choice.

If I had told her, “N-Nothing happened, so please leave me alone,” I was convinced that she wouldn’t believe me at all, not to mention Kim Hyun-Sung. It would be more credible if Jo Hye-Jin told him herself that there wasn’t anything wrong with me.

It was a better choice for me to buy time rather than to waste time by giving unconvincing reasons.

“Stop crying,” I told her.

‘I have to make a private room.’

I felt bad because it felt like I was distancing myself from others, but I wasn’t sure how Kim Hyun-Sung would react if he discovered this place. There were so many things I could obtain from here, so I had to look more into the research materials here.

I didn’t think that I would get anything out of the incompetent Benigoa and Elune scum, so I could only rely on this place for answers to my questions.

I actually wanted to summon Belial, but he had a contract with Benigoa, so it was more troublesome for him to come here. The problems that Benigoa had fixed might even reappear if Belial were to come here, so I had to be careful about summoning him.

There was a complicated situation unfolding up there, and it made things more

complicated for me down here.

I took a seat and looked through the things I couldn't check earlier.

'I don't think it's a bad idea to start looking into this.'

I wasn't convinced that chimeras or even a homunculus could fill the empty spot of the chosen warrior. A chimera could only be Epic or perhaps Legendary at best. It wasn't that bad, but their nature was problematic. There was also the issue of quality.

'Recognition is problematic as well… '

Their root was black magic, and they didn't look like they would fight on the side of light.

Basically, they looked like terrifying monsters, which kind of bothered me…

'Wait, can I not change their appearance?'

If I could use them, it would be for the best.

I wasn't in the position to be picky, so I had to use the magic sword at the very least.

"*Huh?*"

The moment the thought came to my mind, I heard a voice echo in my mind as well.

[Is that all you need?]

CHAPTER 597
THE ERASER IN MY HEAD (4)

'...'

[I asked if that's all you needed.]

'...'

[You're exactly like how I saw, heard, and read. I can't say that you're evil, but I've never met anyone with a soul as disgusting as yours. It's really fun talking to you like this.]

My surprise only lasted for a moment because my habit of flattering those stronger than me kicked into action.

'Oh my... I don't know who you are, but I'm extremely honored that you're talking to me like this. Your beautiful voice brings a blush to my face. What business do you have with this lowly mortal?'

[Lowly? That description doesn't fit you. You're on a different level from those insects, so how can I categorize you with those lovely humans? If I remember correctly, you no longer have business with that child, Belial. Am I right?]

'Belial treated this lowly human generously. How could I be on the same level as the supreme demons?'

[You think so? There are many demons aside from Belial who want to work with you. Paimon, Bathin, Molech, and the demons in the 72 Legions who share the same goal as me are waiting for you.]

'I'm truly honored.'

Who were they? I had no idea of the demon's identity, but they were definitely not an ordinary demon. The biggest hint was the great power they managed to bestow upon those demon contractors. Unfortunately, I couldn't really focus because of Jo

Hye-Jin.

“Sub Guild Master! Are you okay?” Jo Hye-Jin yelled.

‘Shit… What happened?’

I came to my senses and found Jo Hye-Jin checking my condition while biting her lips. It seemed that I had fallen into a daze, similar to how I had fallen into a daze as well while talking to Benigoa.

This wasn’t great because it was the reason Kim Hyun-Sung became suspicious of my condition, and I wasn’t sure how Jo Hye-Jin would react to what she had just seen.

I didn’t know why this great and noble demon decided to grace me with their presence now rather than later, but I couldn’t help but think that they enjoyed seeing me struggling in a complicated situation because demons had mischievous sides.

“P-Please leave. I need to take care of something urgent… I’m fine, so please let me be alone. I’m really okay,” I requested.

“Are you in pain? What’s… How… What should… I’ll call for a priest. We shouldn’t just stand here…”

‘I’m really fine, so just leave me alone, damn it. This is really important to me right now, Hye-Jin. It’s really important.’

“I’m… really fine. So… please… let me be alone… don’t touch me… leave me alone. I’m not in pain, and don’t call a priest because holy power can’t treat me. I was just spacing out… so don’t worry,” I reassured her.

The situation had gotten more interesting, but I couldn’t concentrate on our conversation because Jo Hye-Jin kept on looking at me with desperation.

I bit my lips because I was worried that the misunderstanding might become worse.

However, I couldn’t really tend to Jo Hye-Jin right now, and it had also been quite a while since I had spoken to someone important. I had a gut feeling that they weren’t a division head of a company but the CEO.

More importantly, they graced me with their presence.

Belial was the leader of the 27th Legion—no, there was a high chance that Belial was already among the top ten demons. However, the demon who had graced me with their presence had called Belial a child, and they had also casually called out Paimon, Bathin, and Molech.

In other words, there was a high chance that they were one of the top five demons.

"Sub Guild Master!" Jo Hye-Jin shouted.

'Just stop, damn it. I'm busy, Hye-Jin!'

[Am I interrupting something?]

'No, of course not! You're not interrupting anything. All I have is time, so please, think of this as your home and speak comfortably.'

[You're definitely interesting. I can see why those children had taken an interest in you. I am very interested in you as well, so I would first like to apologize for using such a rude method to get in contact with you. As you already know, the methods by which we can influence the continent are very limited… It's worse for others, including myself. That's why I'd like to sincerely apologize for not being able to greet you in any other way.]

'What do you mean?'

[I'm talking about giving power to those insects to bring you here.]

'Oh no… please don't worry about that. I'm ashamed that you had no choice but to use that kind of method just to meet this lowly mortal. Thank you again.'

[You don't need to lower yourself like that. By the way, it's really interesting that you have such a disgusting soul. I thought this type of flattery wouldn't really affect me… your flattery gives me a strange sense of superiority, and it's been a while since I felt this way. It's definitely amusing.]

"I'll go bring Miss Elena. Elena… She can…"

'Please don't do that, Miss Jo. Your boss is enjoying it.'

"I'm fine… I'm fine… so please give me some time alone. You know… very well… that

holy power can't fix this. Just… leave me alone for a moment," I requested.

"…"

"…"

[Are you really okay?]

'Even if I'm not okay, I'll be fine, so don't worry and continue talking. I'm actually the one that should be apologizing.'

[If possible, I'd like to talk to you face to face, but… It is not as easy as it sounds.]

'That's not true. You can just summon me.'

[It'll only be for a moment, but you'll lose consciousness in the real world.]

'Oh… don't worry about things like that. It really doesn't matter to me.'

[I can only give you a few minutes for us to talk to each other in soul form. Things will become difficult for me if you end up leaving this place while unconscious, so…]

"I-I'll take you to her, Sub Guild Master," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"No. Don't go outside no matter what, and don't tell anyone! No matter what… Please, Miss Hye-Jin. You must… keep this in mind. Don't leave this place. I just need a moment…" I requested.

[I'll be taking you now.]

The scenery peeled away.

Just like how I appeared near the negotiation table with Belial and Benigoa, I soon found myself in a room filled with classically styled furniture. There were luxurious dishes on the big table in the room, and those were dishes I had never seen before.

'I hope Jo Hye-Jin listens to me.'

While I was worried about the outside world, a few butlers entered the room. A stereotypical-looking middle-aged man with a nice mustache wordlessly poured

wine into the empty glass in front of me.

The scene was confusing. I had no idea if my physical body was whisked away or if my soul was the only thing that got whisked away. I blinked and found myself sitting in a chair. I was holding a fork and a knife as well.

'Shit, what was that?'

I was cursing, but I immediately shook my head because a woman was looking at me. She had long black hair and black eyes, but it wasn't the same black color familiar to humans. Her eyes and hair were pitch-black darkness—similar to how space would look without the light of stars.

The feeling I got from here was different from when I first met Belial. I didn't feel overwhelmed; I actually felt comfortable while under her gaze. Her smile was beautiful, and she actually didn't look like a demon.

However, she was definitely a demon, a top demon to boot.

She had told me herself that she had bestowed power upon those demon contractors to lure me to where she was located, so I couldn't help but acknowledge the fact that I was mistaken when I applauded those demon contractors for their determination and hard work.

If she hadn't lied to me, it meant she didn't get summoned. It was more like she appeared voluntarily. However, I had never heard of a demon capable of intervening in the summoning ritual to appear voluntarily.

I was convinced that the reason she managed to use that kind of method was because of her position. I was unaware of the exact structure of hell, but she was definitely in the top five—no, top three.

I wasn't looking down on Benigoa, but there was no way she could handle this woman by herself. Benigoa's higher-ups would have to be dispatched to the continent, which meant the continent would immediately become chaotic.

However, I assumed that she was a soft-liner, so I was hoping that she wouldn't do something as drastic as that.

- That's a very interesting assumption. You got almost all of it right. You're right

about the reason I can only meet you through this method, and you're also right about me being a soft-liner.

'I apologize for my arrogance.'

- It's important to see and understand the person you're meeting for the first time. So… have you figured out what kind of demon I am?

'To be honest… it's kind of difficult for me to answer that.'

- It'll be a lot easier if you think more carefully. As you thought earlier, there aren't that many demons capable of intervening in the summoning ritual to appear voluntarily in the continent… Would you like to take a guess? I think it'll be an interesting conversation…

It seemed Baal was ranked one, while Agares was probably ranked two.

Perhaps Vassago was ranked three…

There was a high chance that Gamigin and Marbas were next to each other in the rankings, but I was sure that demons below rank three couldn't possibly pull off something like this.

In other words, she was either Baal or Agares. I wasn't sure how powerful the demons in the top eight were, but they were definitely significantly more powerful than the demons below them in rankings.

I just had to pick between Baal and Agares, but I hesitated because the great demon in front of me looked far more beautiful, noble, and virtuous than any other demon out there.

- That's interesting.

'Excuse me, but could it be Baal… '

- You're wrong, and I'm definitely not Agares.

She grinned as if she were having fun.

- Actually, my name isn't on the list of the 72 Legion commanders.

I stared at her in confusion, and twelve black wings abruptly spread behind her.

Her wings were indescribably beautiful, and a name popped up in my mind. I wasn't sure whether I was right or wrong, but I had to say the name that had popped up in my mind.

I really had to say it.

'Fallen Angel.'

-…

'…'

- I'm one of the demons that mortals in some dimensions call the Seven Demons.

'…'

- I think it's best if I greet you once again. My name is Lucifer, and I am looking forward to working with you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.

CHAPTER 598
LUCIFER (1)

I glanced briefly at Lucifer.

'The Seven Demons?'

I had never heard of the Seven Demons before. Neither Belial nor Benigoa had told me anything about the Seven Demons. The same went for Rimoura and Lonovera. I pondered briefly, and I reached the conclusion that she was like a higher-up of Belial and the 72 Legions, similar to how Benigoa had higher-ups as well.

I finally understood why she wanted to hide the fact that she had stepped foot onto the continent and the fact that she had voluntarily appeared. The problem here was figuring out why she wanted to see me. Why would the CEO of a large company come all the way here to see me? Unfortunately, she could easily lie to me.

I wasn't a rookie employee waiting for an interview.

I was an executive or a manager waiting to get hired.

I was Doom Ki-Young, a new sensation about to lead a new company as the executive—an innovative employee about to lead the company into a bright future—and a creative employee about to help a struggling company.

If hell was her destination, it was highly likely that she would offer me a position within the 72 Legions, so I had to do my best to impress her.

If she gave me a position, it meant that I would be handling a division affiliated with the 72 Legions. Lucifer was like the CEO of a company, so it was only natural that she wanted to meet me face-to-face. Of course, I couldn't say for sure that it was the only reason she had decided to come and see me personally, but it had to be a part of it.

Perhaps Benigoa's higher-ups would try to contact me soon as well.

I was having many different thoughts while Lucifer was staring at me in amusement.

[You look like you have questions.]

'Yes, I do.'

[…]

'Thanking you over and over again for going through so much trouble just to meet a lowly mortal like me won't be enough, but I'm curious as to why you did all that just to meet me.'

It had to be for an extraordinary reason.

[You don't need to think too deeply about it. Just think of it as me being a little bit curious about you. I heard a lot about you from Belial, and you contributed a lot to that child's merits. Lonovera as well. You helped that child become a leader.]

Lonovera became a leader? How did I help her with that?

[I wanted to be nonchalant about it, but I couldn't contain my excitement. To be honest, it had been a while since I stepped foot into the real world, and if it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have come here.]

'I'm very thankful.'

[I'm a fan of yours, so no need to be so formal. Anyway, let's eat first.]

'Okay.'

[I hope the dishes are to your liking even though you're not actually eating them… I hope it satisfies our Commander Lee Ki-Young's picky taste.]

Lucifer was trying her best to create an enjoyable atmosphere between us, but I felt like it would have been better if she hadn't prepared a feast for me.

There were no free lunches in this world, after all, so it was easy to deduce that she wanted something from me. I was aware of the law of give and take, but it felt more like she was saying, "You better repay me for the treatment I have given you today and what I am about to give you."

Her method was a bit old-fashioned, but it was undeniably effective.

Of course, she would appear as if she were only being kind toward me if I were to not nitpick the details, and I was happy about the treatment as well. However, I knew enough for me to accept deals where I stood to lose more than to gain.

'It's more delicious than anything I have ever tasted. The same thing goes for this wine… I'm quite embarrassed because you're treating a lowly human like me so well.'

[I told you earlier that I was your fan. I kind of fell in love with the popular novel—Actually, I got really into it. Lately, I've been having fun watching you discreetly, but—Well, this isn't important, so let's move on. You probably aren't interested in what I think of you, right?]

I wasn't sure how the fallen angel falling in love with the novel or liking me had to do with anything, but it was true that I wasn't really interested in what she was talking about.

[I'm sure you're more interested in what you stand to gain and the price you have to pay for that.]

Correct.

[The things I can give you are limited. If possible, I'd like to resolve all your problems for you, but that's beyond my control. Of course, it's possible, but someone in my position has to be wary of many things… I believe you understand this, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.]

'Of course, I understand. You really don't need to make comments like that.'

[There's no need to write up a contract. I just need you to fulfill my request.]

'So what is it?'

I came up with quite a few possible requests, but I remained silent.

I felt thirsty and raised my glass, and Lucifer raised her glass as well with a smile. I unknowingly thought about how beautiful she looked, but it was different from your normal beauty, so I couldn't quite describe what I was feeling.

It seemed that she had noticed how nervous I was because she opened her lips and started talking. However, I couldn't quite accept her words.

[I want one of the people working with you. He's a high-ranking human.]

'No way. What is this crazy crow-like bitch talking about?'

Why was she smiling after asking for something so outrageous?

'…'

[No, that's not what I meant. It's not something that'll cause him harm. My offer is actually beneficial for him.]

'…'

[Kim Hyun-Sung. I want him.]

'I don't understand what you want with him.'

[As I said, you don't have to be hostile toward me. I don't have any other intentions, and I'm not trying to take your people away from you. I just thought that it would be nice if he joined us. Of course, his nature is very different for him to work with demons, but… if you're with us, I'm sure he'll eventually adapt]

I was honestly worried that she was going to make a shitty request, but her request ended up being surprising.

Unfortunately, her request was impossible because Kim Hyun-Sung's hostility toward demons was beyond our imagination. The thought of them alone was enough to keep Kim Hyun-Sung up at night.

I didn't find it strange that the fallen angel Lucifer had taken an interest in Kim Hyun-Sung, but her request made it clear that she wasn't aware of Kim Hyun-Sung's personality and just what kind of a person he was.

Even if I managed to bring Kim Hyun-Sung to the demon's side, Kim Hyun-Sung would definitely not cooperate with the demons. I was sure of it. The demons were probably worried about the idea of fighting Kim Hyun-Sung as an enemy.

Lucifer was attempting to poach a talented employee of a company here. Kim Hyun-Sung and the light had great synergy, and I was sure that the gods up there were delighted at the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung was standing on the light.

It was clear that Lucifer wanted talented people, but I couldn't have imagined that our conversation would end up here. I expected nothing less.

It was kind of surprising because Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't contacted separately by either side, but it was probably because both sides were keeping an eye on each other.

[I'm not asking you to convince him or do something about it. If you agree to take on the commander role, I'm sure he'll follow, but… I just want you to deliver the message so that he will be able to accept that truth when that time comes.]

'Well, I'm not sure if that's possible… '

[It's not a bad offer for you, either, so please think about it.]

It was true. If I really had to pick a side, sticking with Kim Hyun-Sung was more beneficial for me.

Even if Belial and Benigoa were on either side, working with someone I really trusted was way better, and Kim Hyun-Sung would probably want to stay with me as well.

He wasn't that great at politics, after all. If he discovered that both of us could ascend to heaven, he would definitely try to get me to stand on the light's side.

'If that's really all you want, I'll agree for now, but… I'm sure you're aware of the contract between Benigoa and Belial. Benigoa holds the negotiation rights for now, and if they make a better offer, I might get swayed.

'The things we have discussed here are great, but it means breaching the contract. I'm sure you're disappointed, but I'm serious, Lucifer. I wanted to nod just to make you happy, but I believe that it'll be more beneficial to me if we—'

[Yes, I'm aware, and I know what kind of person you are. I'm happy that you're taking this more seriously than I initially thought.]

'If there's anything else I can help you with, I'll do my best.'

I said that, but I gave her the idea that I wasn't sure yet because I wanted to gauge her reaction. I looked at the fallen angel as I had thoughts like, "Maybe she'll pry into

it more or maybe she'll offer a different condition. I can't break the contract…"

The butler with a mustache wordlessly filled my wine glass. It was difficult to deduce the butler's thoughts.

[I'm kind of sad because it feels like I'm the one who's on the losing side, but… I don't think it really matters. You fit this side more than the other side… Don't you agree?]

'Honestly, there's a higher chance that I'll join hell, but… you never know what's going to happen. The reason I didn't give an answer is that I respect you, Supreme Great Demon Lucifer. I hope my answer didn't make you feel uncomfortable.'

[You seem worried about what might happen afterward…]

'I won't deny it.'

It seemed that I ruined the mood, so it was best for us to move on.

[Well, this might actually be better. As you mentioned, if you had given me an answer right away, I would have felt kind of uncomfortable about it… That's it for me, so let's talk about you now. It seems like you've been struggling a lot lately…]

'…'

[I have an idea about your situation, and I'm sure you need a new power. I'd like to give you my power, but your mana wave has better synergy with Belial. You could go out of your way to accept it, but the result won't be pretty, so that's why I can't recommend it.]

Of course, I wasn't planning on accepting it.

[I'd like to give you ten wings as a gift if possible, but…]

I would have to respectfully decline if there would be any side effects.

[I think it's impossible with that maggot-like body of yours. *Ah*, I wasn't trying to insult you.]

'I'm currently not in the position to request anything, so I'll gladly accept whatever you give me. I'll do my best to kill that arrogant Outer God and its dirty pigeons so that this

continent will eventually be under your command.'

[That sounded nice, but it didn't sound sincere, though… I'd like to give you something myself, but I can't do that, which is unfortunate. However, I think it's best if I show you a few things… Would you like to take a look?]

I wasn't sure what it was, but that was what I wanted.

I looked at Lucifer as if I were telling her that I would pledge eternal allegiance to her.

Lucifer smiled at my pious look.

CHAPTER 599
LUCIFER (2)

[Influencing the continent consumes a lot of power, and this applies to those who are on the side of light as well. I'm not saying this to burden you, but I believe you'll repay me for this incident someday.]

'You're right, Lucifer.'

[I have a few items, so feel free to take a look.]

I nodded, and the butlers brought out a few items. I was sure the demons called these items magic swords.

I wasn't sure if these items were prepared beforehand, but I didn't have to use Mind's Eye to know that these were mythic-ranked items.

I had a few issues, and it was the fact that the swords looked too much like a magic sword.

The swords' appearances were terrifying.

There was one that looked like it was alive because there were hundreds of eyes on the handle, and another sword was designed to look like the mouth of a beast. I wasn't sure if it noticed me, but a tongue popped out of the beast's mouth, and the way it was drooling forced me to look away.

I wasn't sure why that large tongue kept looking at me.

[That child must like you.]

I didn't want it to like me.

[There are weapons for those with *special* tastes. For example, that one has six tongues and if it's to your liking, I'm sure it'll be a great playmate. How about it? Personally, I'd like to see you play with that child.]

'Haha… I'm fine. I'm not very strong, so it'll be difficult for me to wield a magic sword.'

[It looks like a sword, but there are magic swords that amplify your magic abilities as well. However, there's a small issue. The issue is that it uses the wielder's blood as fuel.]

Yeah, no thanks.

[It also consumed the wielder's soul, albeit slowly. Anyway, there's also a magic sword that turns the wielder into a high-ranking swordsman.]

Was she talking about that sword with a spirit of a grandpa inside the gem embedded on its hilt? I would never use that one. I would probably get cursed as soon as I touched it.

I quickly eliminated the swords that looked *demonic*. Wouldn't it be a bit too much for those swords to replace the holy sword? The sword had to look holy on the outside, at the very least. After all, the sword had to be holy for it to be called a holy sword.

In other words, the magic swords here were out of the question, and I actually felt like grumbling to her for bringing these swords here. Of course, if these swords were all that she had in her arsenal, I would have no choice but to choose one of them.

Unfortunately, these swords truly weren't suitable to stand on the light's side.

Some of them even looked so grotesque that I couldn't quite describe them.

[Looks like none of them is to your liking. I thought I chose the decent ones. How about taking that child that desperately wants you?]

No, thanks.

'Lucifer, the supreme great demon and the amalgamation of beauty. I'm really sorry for saying this, but do you have a sword that looks more crude? I'm sure you already expected this, but based on my position on the continent… '

[I know, but the majority of the weapons I have look similar to each other…]

'…'

Shit. Should I just take one of these swords? I thought the sword with the gramps wailing inside the gem on its hilt was better than the others.

I could just tell the others that the hero who had saved the world centuries ago had decided to seal himself in the gem for the sake of helping the people in the future.

- I-I'll curse… you… You damn… humaaaaaans… I'll… kill you over… and over again… How dare… you…

'All right, I won't take you, gramps.'

Now that I thought about it, the sword with eyes all over its handle wasn't that bad, but it looked kind of disgusting.

- *Kee! Kee! Kee! Keeeeee!*

Nope.

- Cry out, I am the sword that cuts down demons!

I had no idea what that was, but it was a no for me as well.

I was beginning to question if there was even at least one sword that was normal here, and I was definitely not going to take the sword with six tongues.

Its functions were great, but I had a feeling I had to recharge it every day.

I felt a shiver down my spine seeing its six tongues move around.

There was also no way I could tell people that the tongues were Benigoa's tongues.

I racked my brain in an effort to pick the best sword.

[How about this one?]

Lucifer showed me an ordinary-looking sword with a smile. She had to have brought these swords out to see my reaction and entertain herself. I did think that she had a really bad taste in hobbies, but I immediately nodded while looking at the sword.

[The Fallen Angel's 666th Holy Magic Sword - Mythic Rank]

The ordinary-looking sword looked so brilliant in my eyes that my jaw dropped to the ground. Its gray blade caught my attention, and the classic images of gods and goddesses were carved on it as well. It truly looked like a holy sword at first impression.

The energy that it was emitting made me frown, but it was so subtle that one would only discover that energy using Mind's Eye.

It was the perfect sword, and I figured that its existence was only possible because of Lucifer. I found it hard to stop myself from smiling while looking at the magic sword. I was aware that there would be side effects and penalties, but I wasn't going to use it, so it didn't really matter to me.

Lucifer grinned when she noticed that I was having a hard time hiding my smile.

'Is it… really okay for me to accept this kind of item… '

[Yes. I believe I'll get a return on my investment.]

'I'll do whatever it takes… I'll do my best to repay you for this weapon.'

[I'm looking forward to it, Commander Lee Ki-Young. If possible, I'd like to spend more time with you, but it's time for us to part. I hope I didn't take too much of your time…]

'No! Of course not. I would never entertain such disrespectful thoughts. I also feel really sad about saying goodbye because I truly enjoyed our time together. If we still have some time left, how about we have another glass of wine… '

[I'd like nothing more than to spend more time with you, but we're out of time. I'm actually starting to worry about the others, and it's not like I don't have other matters to attend to as well. Anyway, this is where we say goodbye. Thank you for bringing excitement to my boring life.]

'You're making me blush, Lucifer.'

[I'm sorry for asking this before we part ways, but if it's not too much trouble, could I get your autograph?]

'Of course. It's no problem at all.'

I knew Doom Ki-Young was popular in hell, but I couldn't have imagined that Lucifer would make this kind of request.

There were books written in the language of demons, and I recognized the word plague in one of the books. I figured that it was an educational book.

I wasn't sure where these books had come from, but the butlers were busy moving these mysterious books. My arm was starting to hurt, but I was happy to do something like this for her.

If this was all it took to gain her favor, I would do it again and again.

'Do you enjoy reading?'

[Yes, and those books are from an event… I mean an exhibition that opened up in hell. As for the details…]

'Ah, looks like I was being nosy.'

Lucifer smiled, but she didn't say anything.

I wasn't sure if she had forgotten the fact that she was in a hurry, but she patiently waited until I was done signing all the books.

I knew the flow of time between the subconscious world and the real world was different, but it felt like it had been quite a while since I got here.

I moved my arm mindlessly like a machine, and I started to get curious about Jo Hye-Jin's reaction. I felt nervous about what was happening outside. I looked up, thinking that it was over, but I saw an endless row of books.

A few hours later, Lucifer nodded in satisfaction.

[It was great to meet you.]

'No, it was my honor.'

[I'm worried that I took too much of your time.]

'Hahaha, it's fine.'

It wasn't fine. It seemed that my fleshly body was still in Zone Five, but I wasn't happy about the fact that I had fallen unconscious in front of someone else.

I got what I wanted, and we were done here, so I wanted her to send me back.

Unfortunately, I had no idea what to say.

Luckily, Lucifer had to have thought that it was about time we parted ways.

[It was fun, Commander Lee Ki-Young.]

She waved her hand, and I felt weightless as if I were falling into an abyss.

The scenery peeled away.

~

"Please… Please…" Jo Hye-Jin mumbled.

'What the… '

The first thing I saw was Jo Hye-Jin's face.

'Why is she so close?'

I wasn't sure if she was aware of the fact that she was crying, but her tears were falling on my face. I had no idea how long I had been unconscious, but it seemed that it wasn't that long—thirty minutes, perhaps?

I was so exhausted that I wanted to take a nap, but…

"*Heuk*…"

I had to let her know that I was awake.

"*Ah*…"

A-A-Are you okay? Are you really okay?" Jo Hye-Jin asked immediately.

"Where…"

“Do you remember me? I-I’m J-Jo Hye-Jin… This is Zone Five. Y-You’re Lee Ki-Young of the Blue Guild… and w-we’re friends,” she stuttered.

“That’s not what I was asking, Miss Hye-Jin. I told you it wasn’t anything serious,” I told her.

“…”

“I remember everything, so you don’t have to explain every little detail,” I added.

“…”

“You don’t have to treat me like some elderly man with Alzheimer's since it’s not that serious yet. I remember the details. You were crying earlier, and you’re crying again,” I said.

“I-I—*Heuk!* I wasn’t crying,” she said.

“Thank you… for listening to my request,” I mumbled.

“If you woke up ten minutes later, I would have taken you straight to the guild. Actually… I want to take you away right now,” she said.

“Don’t you already know that it’s futile? Anyway… thank you,” I said.

“…”

“How long was I out?” I asked.

“About fifteen minutes…” she replied.

“So it has been a while…” I commented.

“Are you… Are you really okay? Seriously…” she questioned.

“Yes, it happens from time to time, so don’t worry. I know I told you this before, but don’t take it too seriously,” I reminded her.

“If you’re tired… you can tell me,” she mumbled.

'I'm fine, Hye-Jin. I'm not tired at all. We hit the jackpot. I found a way for us to succeed.'

If I could, I would have screamed for joy, but…

'The air is stuffy and gloomy.'

Jo Hye-Jin's expression was really bothering me, but it couldn't be helped. I had fainted in front of her, after all.

CHAPTER 600
HOW TO OVERCOME (1)

The atmosphere was so gloomy that someone would think that we were mourning. Jo Hye-Jin's face was covered in tears and snot, which was unlike her.

I had a negative thought that perhaps she was purposely going overboard with her reaction, but it wasn't strange for her to react that way after thinking about what I had done.

'Yeah, I'm sure she was really shocked.'

It had only been a few minutes since she heard the shocking news that I was losing my memory. To make things worse, a man with a frail body was repeatedly spacing out and suddenly collapsed in front of her.

In other words, it wasn't strange that she panicked.

I had no idea what happened, but she was probably panicking a lot while running around the room. I couldn't help but lower my head when I saw her pitiful state. Jo Hye-Jin was still shell-shocked, but I was happy upon recalling the grand feast that Lucifer had prepared for me.

'It was just as delicious as the Mirror Salmon.'

I was talking about the Mythic-ranked sword. Of course, I still felt bad about Jo Hye-Jin.

"I'm fine," I said.

"You keep saying that, but how can I believe you? Please… take care of yourself. You can tell us if you're in pain. There are many people willing to help, so why… Actually, I think it's best to tell everyone the truth, including the guild master…" Jo Hye-Jin suggested.

"What?"

“We must tell everyone and find a way. I think that’s the only way. What if… What if you really forget everything? What if… you lose all of your memories? At this rate… *Heuk*…” she paused.

“This is why I didn’t want to tell you. You’re already like this, so how do you think the others will react? I told you there’s an order to everything. I prioritize my life over my memories, so don’t even think about telling other people. They have many things to do, and we can’t waste time by getting caught up in weird things,” I explained.

“How is this strange? And it’s not a waste of time. This is—”

“If that’s not a waste of time, then what is? This is like trying to grab smoke with your own hands.” I interrupted her.

“But still…”

“I told you I’m not sick. If I really were in pain, I would’ve made a big fuss about it. You know me, so don’t turn this into a serious situation… I think it’s best if we join the party members for now since it’s not good for us to stay away from them for so long…” I suggested.

“…”

“Please act like you usually do. Wash your face and calm down. They might get suspicious that something happened,” I told her.

“…”

“Let’s hurry and leave,” I urged.

“…”

“…”

“Stupid bastard…” muttered Jo Hye-Jin, and I could hear the concern in her voice despite the insult.

I was in a good mood. The mythic rank magic sword in my infinity bag was enough for me to dance for joy, and there was a spring in my steps as I walked away.

The fact that Jo Hye-Jin didn't tell anyone was enough for me to give her a thumbs up.

She had never really been flexible, but she actually decided to do me a favor.

She looked kind of nervous, but in the end, she decided to listen to me because she wasn't the type to go around and tell people about other people's secrets.

She had always been the type of person to keep someone else's secret, after all.

'Aww, our Hye-Jin is so considerate… '

I was kind of worried, but it was more important to decide who would wield Lucifer's magic sword.

If no one could use it, I figured it would be fine for me to use it. However, it would be better for someone else to use this, as I had come here in the first place to find someone who could replace the chosen warrior.

As long as we had the same goal, the journey didn't matter. In other words, it wasn't a big deal even if Benigoa had ended up choosing a holy warrior.

Actually, the issue here was whether I could find a chosen warrior or not and if they were qualified to wield the magic sword. It was a peculiar sword, so wielding it would definitely be a bit more taxing.

And that was exactly why I couldn't hand this to a guild member. Of course, I didn't think there was anyone in the guild capable of wielding this holy sword aside from me.

"Excuse me, Sub Guild Master," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"Yes?"

"No, it's nothing," she replied.

Jo Hye-Jin was probably worried about me because I was spacing out once again.

"If it's about telling the others, I won't allow it," I reminded her.

"No, it's not that. It's just… I don't know how I should act in front of the other

members… and what I should tell the guild master…" she mumbled.

"Just act as usual. If you think things are getting a bit dangerous, you can step up and help, but just act normal. If I faint again, you have to help me," I instructed.

"Okay."

"You can just tell Mr. Hyun-Sung that I've been stressed out lately," I added.

"He won't believe me," she commented.

"No, he will. I guarantee that you telling him is more helpful than me telling him," I told her.

"What?"

"You'd be surprised about how much Mr. Hyun-Sung trusts you. If you report to him the things I told you earlier, he probably won't ask any more questions," I answered.

'I'm right, Hye-Jin. Why do you think Hyun-Sung picked you first?'

"Is that true?" she asked.

"It is," I answered.

'So don't tell him no matter what.'

Jo Hye-Jin smiled slightly.

"So if you don't want to break that trust, hide it well. I don't think he's going to say much, but it's still better to be safe than sorry. If my condition worsens, I'll tell Mr. Hyun-Sung myself, but if I'm lucky, my condition will get better before the deadline. Goddess Benigoa said it'll be difficult, but who knows? Miracles do happen. It is what it is," I explained.

"You sound hopeful, which is unlike you," she commented.

"You know that's not what I was going for. Just accept it. I'm sure there's a way, and if I make a breakthrough here… Anyway, let's stop with the meaningless talk and just act like you normally do," I reminded her.

“A breakthrough… a breakthrough…” Jo Hye-Jin mumbled.

I heard Park Deok-Gu’s voice as soon as I took another step.

“Why are you guys so late?”

“There were just a lot of things I needed to bring with me, but it looks like it took longer than I thought. How was it?” I asked.

“I have no idea. Ask that shaman noonim and Miss Sora. By the way, you don’t look so good Hye-Jin noonim…” He pointed out.

“…”

“…”

“Did something happen?” he asked.

‘This pig is so quick-witted.’

I was confident and worried at the same time. I was worried that Jo Hye-Jin might scream, “He has Alzheimer’s!”

Fortunately, Jo Hye-Jin reacted the way I wanted her to react.

“No, nothing happened. It just took us longer than expected to organize the data in the bio lab. I decided to help him. Right, Sub Guild Master? See, he agrees. I just helped him out. Nothing happened, so you don’t have to worry, Mr. Deok-Gu.”

“*Hm…*”

“Let’s hurry and go inside,” she suggested.

Her reaction was within my expectations, but her acting skill was garbage. I was thankful that she was doing her best, but it was obvious that she wasn’t acting like her usual self. She looked extremely flustered, and she looked like she was forcibly shifting the narrative in her favor. I couldn’t help but look away because this was no different from her announcing to everyone that something had happened.

‘Man… She’s making me feel uneasy.’

I knew Jo Hye-Jin wasn't capable of pulling a hidden camera prank on someone, but I had no idea that her acting skill was this abysmal. I actually thought that it would have been for the better if she had remained quiet. Park Deok-Gu seemed startled by the urgency in her voice, and I saw him looking at me suspiciously.

"I was just asking, so no need to act that way… So nothing really happened?" Park Deok-Gu asked again.

"What would happen in a place like this? Let's head in," I urged.

"Well, if you say so, hyung-nim… Hye-Jin noonim seems to be acting strange. Maybe it's just me…" he said.

"She's been really stressed out lately, so yeah, it's just you. Anyway, are you just going to keep standing there?" I asked.

"Let's go, I was going to head in any way. I was actually starving. If you came just a little bit later, I would've gone to you to ask when we were going to eat," he complained.

"You should've eaten first," I told him.

"We should eat together. We're family, after all. Aren't you hungry as well?" he asked.

"Well… earlier, I—" I caught myself in time.

Fortunately, Jo Hye-Jin turned around and backed me up. "I gave him a small snack. He said he was hungry."

"*Ah,* is that right?" he asked.

"Yes, but we still need to eat a proper meal for the sake of meeting our daily nutrient intake, so I think it's best we prepare some food," she suggested.

"Yes, of course. A hard worker has to eat a lot. Hyung-nim, you should stop eating junk food and eat a bit of everything to become healthy," Park Deok-Gu said.

I had almost sabotaged myself, but a catastrophe didn't happen because of Jo Hye-Jin. Of course, I could have just laughed it off, but I would gladly accept that kind of help whenever and wherever.

I glanced at Jo Hye-Jin, and she nodded, seemingly telling me not to worry. She had told me that she would help me in any way she could, but seeing her actually helping me made me smile.

'At least, she won't cause trouble first.'

I was still nervous, but she handled the situation pretty well.

It seemed Park Deok-Gu was really hungry because he ran away in a hurry.

Soon, I saw Jung Ha-Yan, Han Sora, and Kasugano Yuno. As expected, Jung Ha-Yan came running to me with a bright smile upon seeing me, while Han Sora was smiling in satisfaction.

We didn't really need to prepare anything because we just set up the combat ration we brought, and the party members took their seats with their spoons.

During this, Jo Hye-Jin looked doubtful about something.

It was as if her head was filled with all sorts of thoughts.

I was sure she was convinced that short-term memory loss wasn't the only issue I was having. I wasn't certain, but she was probably thinking that I would often lose my mind. I could have given an excuse and told her that she had misunderstood, but she had already heard and seen everything, so it wasn't easy for her to overlook it.

'It's understandable.'

I was grateful that she was helping, but I had to resolve the misunderstanding before it got worse. I had to tell her that my gimmick was just short-term memory loss and that temporarily becoming a madman wasn't one of my gimmicks.

"H-How was your work, oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"*Ah*, I'm going to go back later. There were many documents, so I couldn't organize them that quickly. How were things here? Did you find anything?" I asked.

"N-No-No. We… didn't find anything really exciting. We found some interesting items, but… they stopped researching the majority of them…" she replied.

“How about you, Miss Sora?” I asked.

“Yes. There were research documents regarding body enhancement, but they aren’t that great considering the fatal side effects. I don’t think it was a method that the demon contractors used… Still, we managed to collect many documents about the summoning,” Han Sora replied.

“*Hm*… I see,” I said.

“Miss Kasugano…”

“I apologize, but I couldn’t really find anything either,” Kasugano said.

“B-B-But I think the documents are still useful because the scope of their research was pretty wide. Of course, the majority of them were useless, but… there were some that looked dangerous…” Jung Ha-Yan added.

‘That’s for me to decide. It’s probably only dangerous in your eyes.’

‘Still, I think it’s worth investigating… You need to know about the virus to develop a vaccine. I looked around for a moment and noticed that their research wasn’t just limited to black magic, so I’m sure we’ll find something useful,” Han Sora chimed in.

And that was when Jo Hye-Jin spoke, “Are you saying that perhaps we’ll find a cure for people suffering from a sequela or those who are struggling mentally?”

My heart was gripped by anxiety.

‘Hye-Jin, please don’t do this… please don’t backstab me.’

CHAPTER 601
HOW TO OVERCOME (2)

“What do you mean? Are you talking about hyung-nim?”

Park Deok-Gu happened to ask the right question at the right time. He spoke as if he was asking for more details, like he was already aware of what was going on. I couldn’t help but look at Jo Hye-Jin.

“I told you that I’m healthy. I’m totally fine,” I commented.

“That’s what you think, but you were unconscious for four days, so what’s more is there to say? I’m certain you’re suffering from a sequela. You say you’re fine, but your body is saying otherwise.

”The fact that you keep fainting is proof of that. I didn’t say anything because I didn’t have the chance, but you really need to take care of yourself,” he said.

“It wasn’t the first time I fainted, and as I said before, it has nothing to do with *that* power. I actually feel like I’ve gotten healthier recently, so it’s probably because I’m just exhausted physically. It’s been a while since I felt something else…” I told him.

“You *think* that way, but that’s not what your body is saying. The human body is like that. I remember a middle-aged man living next door to me, and he was really healthy, but he suddenly got sick and crossed the Jordan River[1] in just three months,” he said.

“…”

“I’m saying this to everyone, not just to you. Take care of your health so that you’ll live a long life. I’m more worried about you than the others because you’re really frail. Anyway, are you really okay?” he asked.

“Miss Elena and Miss Hee-Young said they didn’t find any problems with my health, so why do you keep—”

“I’m just asking because we can’t say for sure. I didn’t mean anything by it. It’s strange how you’re overreacting… Are you sure you’re not hiding something?” he interrupted.

‘I’m not hiding something, you pig.’

It was ridiculous how Park Deok-Gu was being so fierce with his argument when he had zero evidence. However, I felt like I couldn’t shut him down. I looked around and noticed that everyone was listening to him.

Jung Ha-Yan looked like she was about to cry, so she was obviously entertaining negative thoughts. Kasugano Yuno also looked at me suspiciously, while Han Sora looked at me while biting her lips. I was sure they thought of the same thing.

They were definitely thinking that I was suffering from a sequela.

Han Sora’s reaction was understandable because she was the one who would suffer the most if everyone found out that there was something wrong with me. Meanwhile, Jo Hye-Jin’s eyes quivered ever so slightly.

‘She’s thinking… ’

I wasn’t sure if she was thinking that perhaps she shouldn’t have brought it up, but it felt like she was giving in to the temptation.

It looked as if everyone was on board with what Park Deok-Gu had said. Honestly, it didn’t matter even if Kasugano Yuno, Park Deok-Gu, or even Han Sora were to find out.

I was afraid of Jung Ha-Yan’s reaction. The rookie black mage had already gathered her hands to pray while Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my arm with a powerful grip that made me feel as if she were trying to twist my arm off.

‘Hye-Jin… don’t do this.’

Was this how Ito Sota and Jin Cheong felt when they had to entrust their fate to me back then?

I had no choice but to look at Jo Hye-Jin sadly.

I gave her the look that said, “Don’t tell them. I don’t want to trouble the guild members, and I can do this on my own,” but she avoided my gaze.

I couldn’t help but think that my short sweet dream was coming to an end.

“…”

“…”

“No, that’s not what I meant,” said Jo Hye-Jin.

“…”

‘That’s right, Hye-Jin. I trust you! I really trust you, so let’s continue trusting each other, okay?’

“I’m worried about the sub guild master’s health, but I believe we’ve taken care of it. Miss Elena also said that he’s getting better, and I believe he’ll continue to get better. I was talking about the others who are suffering from the aftermath of the 27th legion incident,” Jo Hye-Jin continued.

“I guess there are still people suffering out there because of what the 27th legion had done…” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“The temple is providing support, but they lack manpower. Priests that deal with mental health are pretty rare as well…” she added.

“Really?” he asked.

“Would it be easier to understand if I told you that one priest has to take care of at least 500 to 1,000 people? It’s not as simple as normal treatment where you just use holy power and cure them. In my case, I stabilized quickly because of Miss Elena, but other people aren’t as lucky as me,” I chimed in.

“…”

“There are people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders out there as well as people who have been exposed to demonic energy. Of course, there are also those unlucky enough to have been inflicted with a curse.

”I hope you haven’t forgotten that it has only been a year since that incident,” I added.

“On the outside, it looks like the people are doing fine… but I guess it’s different behind the scenes. Miss Shaman, is it the same in Celia?” he asked.

“Celia is doing a bit better than the other regions,” Kasugano replied.

“…”

I wasn’t lying when I said that many people were struggling with mental health issues, but I was sure that this was great news for the army that lives off of negative emotions.

The demons’ goal was to leave a deep scar on the continent, and they had indeed succeeded. The first syllable of Belial’s name was enough to make anyone jump out of their seats in fear.

The continent had become so wary and scared of the 27th Legion that even a massive army filled with millions of soldiers wouldn’t be enough to assuage the fears of the continent’s denizens.

In other words, there was no guarantee that those who had been traumatized by the 27th Legion would recover, even if we were to give them treatment under a priest specializing in mental health.

In the end, we had no choice but to hope that time would eventually heal their wounds.

“The sub guild master is right. We may be able to use the items here to come up with a way to treat those in pain…” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“You mean there’s a possibility?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

Of course, it was possible. In addition, it was the storyline that I really wanted them to believe. I truly didn’t expect that Jo Hye-Jin would create a stage for me.

“Who knows? I honestly can’t guarantee it, but… I think it’s possible. We still haven’t explored all the rooms here, so I can’t say with certainty, especially since mental issues are difficult to handle.

”However, there might be a way to cure those who have been exposed to demonic energy,” I answered.

“Does that mean the continent will benefit from all this?” asked Park Deok-Gu.

“Probably,” said Jo Hye-Jin.

I turned and saw Han Sora nodding. She was probably thinking that she could transfer here, but it meant Jung Ha-Yan would have to spend her time here as well.

‘I’ll stay here as well.’

“Well, I’m glad that what we’re doing here is for the greater good, but aren’t you going to eat, hyung-nim?” he asked.

“I’m done eating,” I answered.

“You barely ate, and you’re saying you’re done eating? That’s not good for your health, so you should eat more,” he suggested.

“I don’t really have an appetite,” I told him.

“That’s going to ruin your health,” he commented.

“Please eat,” Jo Hye-Jin chimed in.

“Even she’s saying that you should eat,” he said.

“Go ahead and eat,” she said.

“No, really,” I said.

“Please eat it all,” she urged.

“Alright…” I mumbled.

I was just going to let it pass, but I was bothered by Jo Hye-Jin’s glare.

I really felt like I couldn’t eat anymore, but I kept on swallowing every spoon of food. The short meal time soon ended, and we started gaining momentum in our work.

Thanks to the goal and excuse Jo Hye-Jin had made, I was able to investigate the traces that the demon contractors had made without being discreet about it.

I ended up reaching a better result than I initially thought.

Jo Hye-Jin would sometimes pull me aside to warn me, but I had a lot of trust in her, so I simply nodded at her words. In the end, she gave me a condition that I had to fulfill in exchange for her promise not to tell anyone. If I had zero progress even after a certain period of time or if my condition worsened, she would have to intervene.

I couldn't help but laugh at Jo Hye-Jin's words that this place could actually be a game-changer for us, but of course, I liked it here.

'I can completely focus on my research here.'

I could stay here for an extended period of time by using my treatment as an excuse to convince Jo Hye-Jin. It was a great thing that I had such a card since it allowed me to research homunculi and chimeras. I also managed to study black magic in depth with Han Sora and Jung Ha-Yan.

Of course, we still had no idea if what we were researching here would immediately become useful to us, but I had no doubts that we would reap a ton of profits here, as the level of the researchers were out of this world.

No one knew this aside from me, but Han Sora was the number one expert when it came to black magic, while Jung Ha-Yan was the incarnation of magic itself.

In other words, I was sure they would find a way to help me succeed even if I failed the first time around.

'This is nice. Good job, Hye-Jin.'

The fact that she kept on crying was bothering me, but I had no choice but to endure it.

'I'll treat you well later, Hye-Jin. I'll be your avatar again, so let's succeed.'

One and a half days later, we were finally done with our preliminary investigation.

We were going home today.

“Then, are you going to keep staying here?” asked Jo Hye-Jin.

“No, I actually have many things to handle out there, so I think it’s best to leave this place to Miss Sora for now,” I replied.

“*Hmm*…”

“She’ll do well. She’s more competent than you think, especially in this field. However, I’m going to join here once the tools here are repaired. Of course, I’ll be taking care of other matters at the same time, so… I just need you to assuage their worries,” I said.

‘Especially Kim Hyun-Sung.’

“That won’t be a problem; just keep in mind the things I told you,” she reminded me.

‘Of course. How can I forget what you said to me?’

I made the decision to tell her that my condition had improved the moment I made some progress with my research. Of course, I could also tell her directly that I had completely recovered.

“From now on—”

“*Ah*, I think I should visit the temple first as well,” I interrupted.

“The temple?” she asked.

“I’m getting a strong feeling that Goddess Benigoa is calling for me,” I told her.

“I hope it’s good news. Please… let it be good news,” she mumbled.

I was expecting Benigoa to have good news for me, but unfortunately, I had a feeling that it was something more important than that. Perhaps she had finally decided to save mankind, and it was exactly like what I expected.

The next morning, the magic sword—I mean, the holy sword, descended from the heavens in a massive pillar of light and buried itself in the holy grounds, waiting for its owner.

It emitted a noble air, similar to the legendary Excalibur.

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1. A biblical reference where it means to enter the promised land of blessing ☜

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